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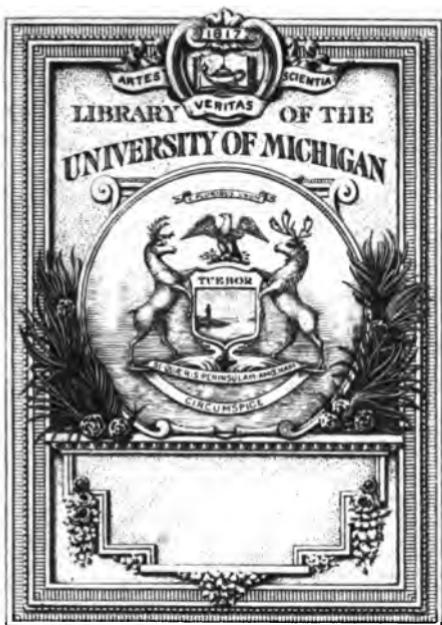
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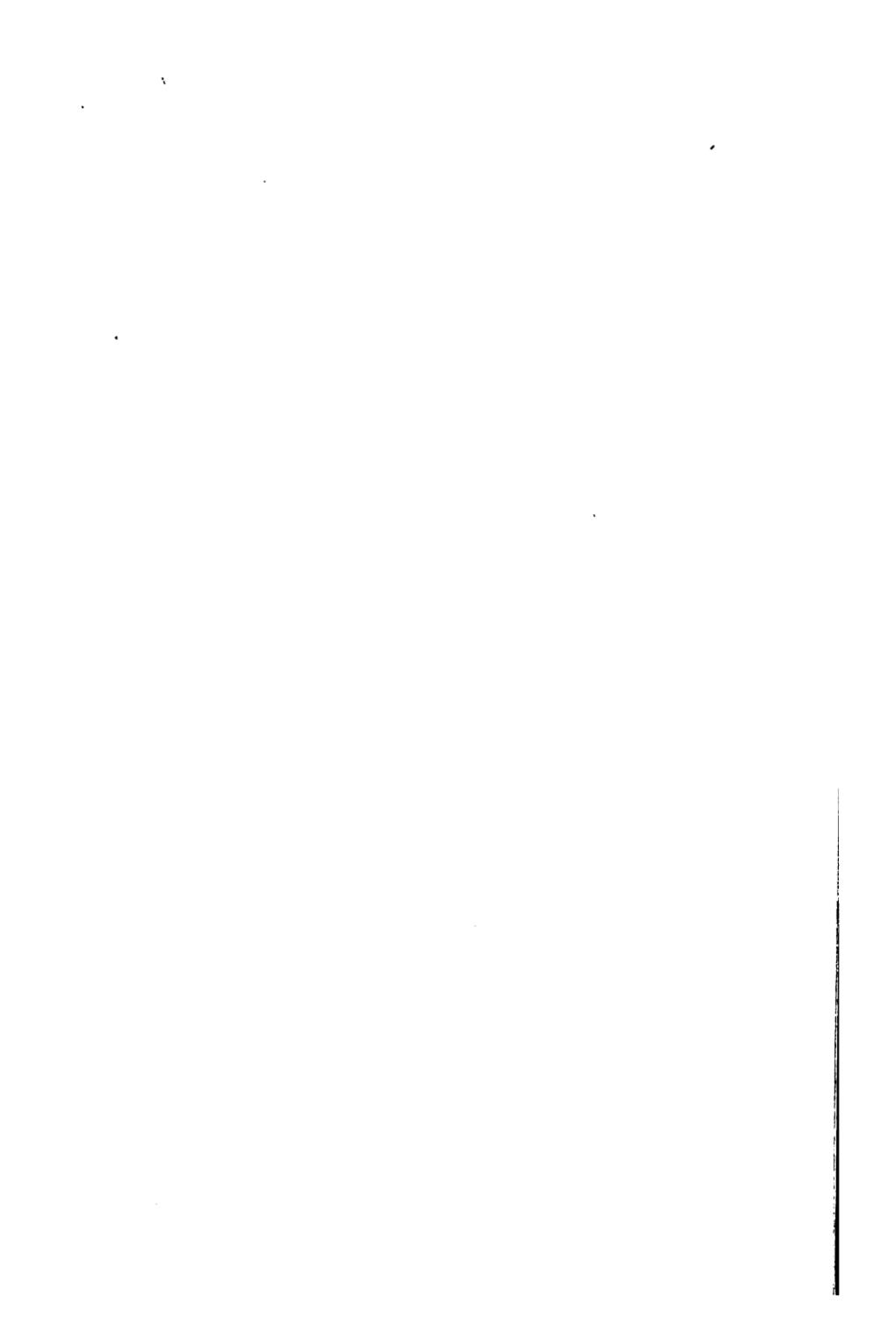


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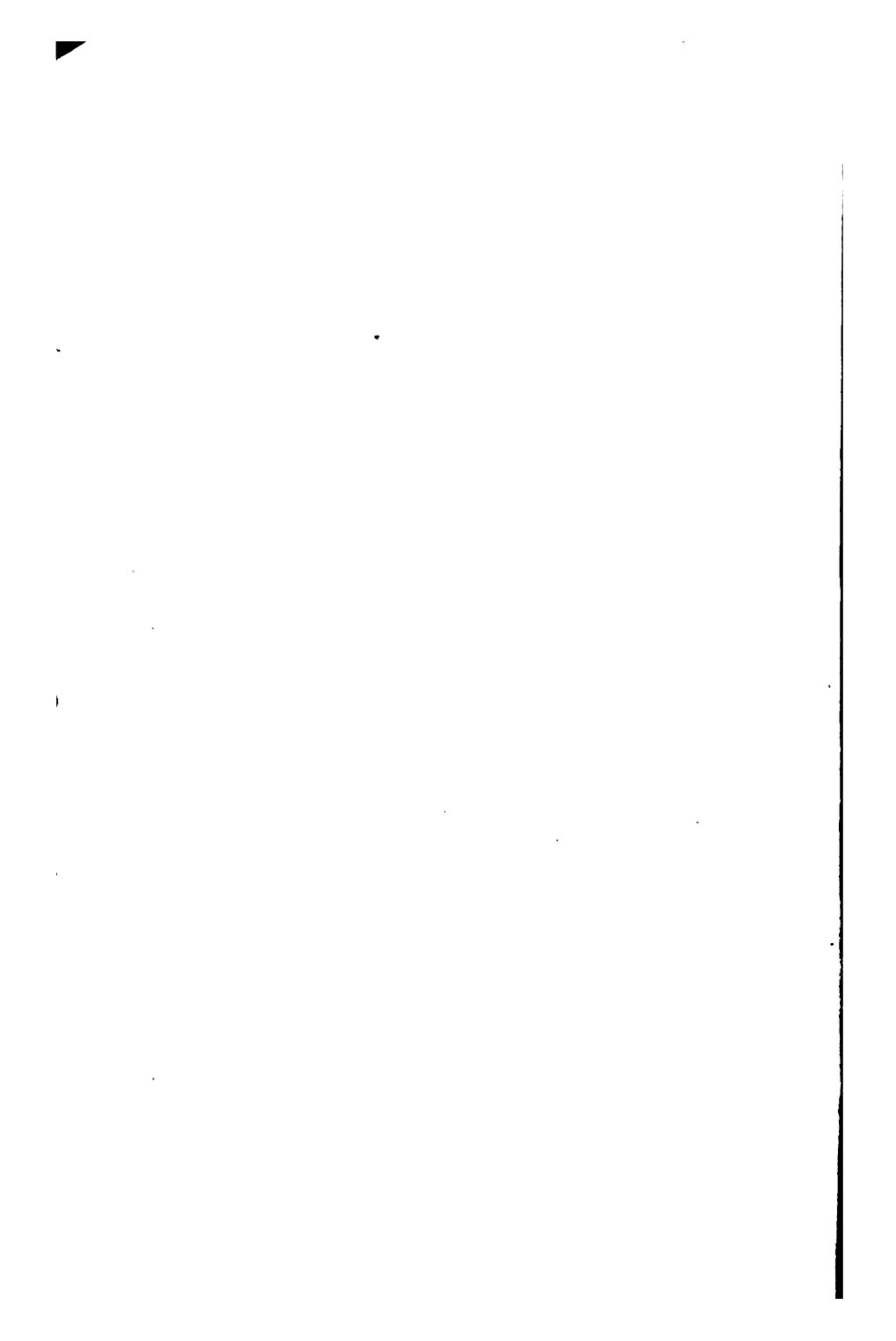
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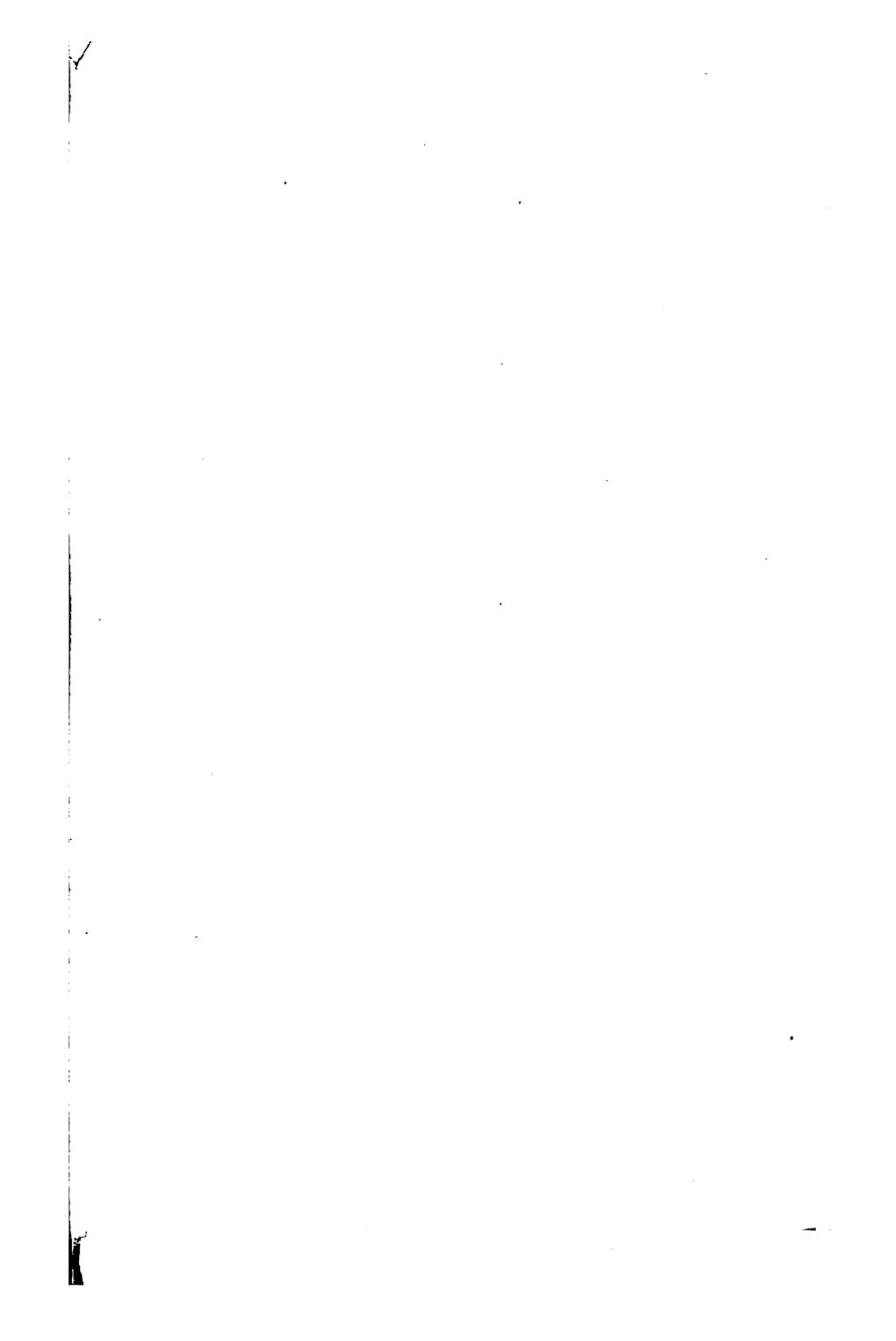
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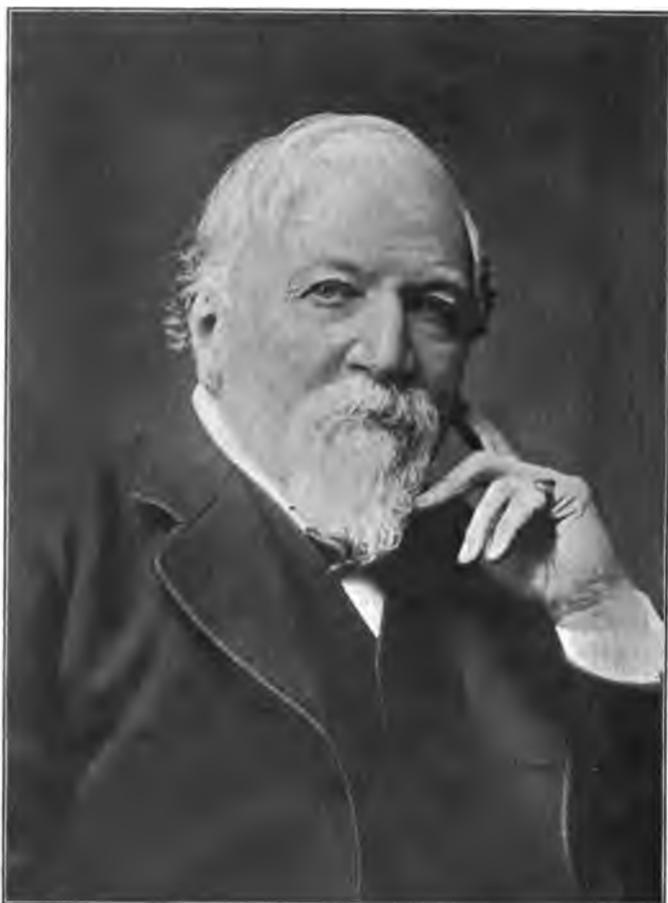
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# THE BEST OF BROWNING, *Robert*

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BY  
REV. JAMES MUDGE, D.D.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY  
REV. WILLIAM V. KELLEY, D.D.



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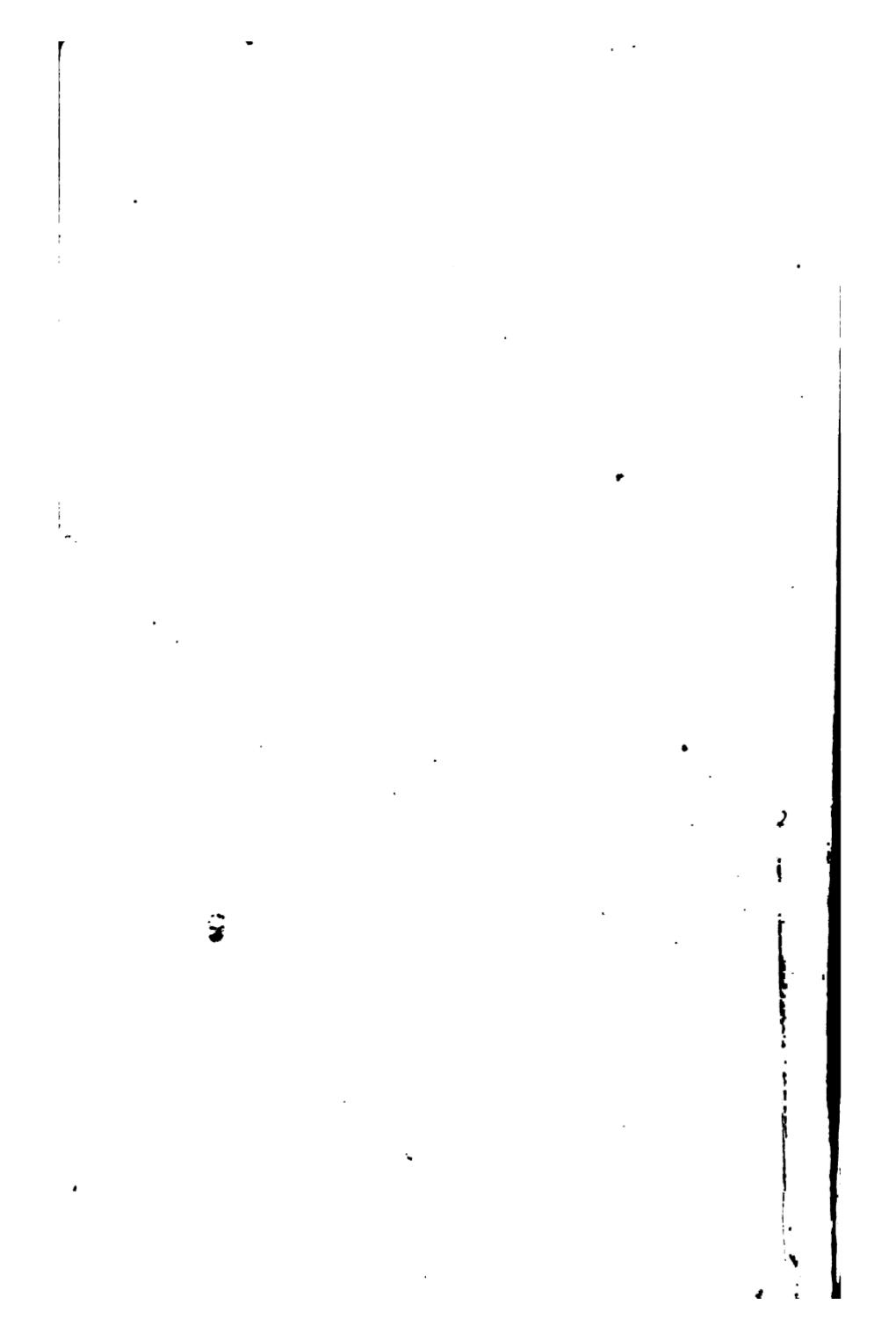
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TO

BISHOP JOHN H. VINCENT, D.D., LL.D.,

WHOSE ILLUSTRIOS SERVICES TO THE CAUSE OF EDUCATION HAVE  
ACHIEVED FOR HIM IMPERISHABLE HONOR AS WELL AS UNI-  
VERSAL GRATITUDE, AND TO WHOSE SUGGESTION  
THIS BOOK OWES ITS ORIGIN, ITS AUTHOR  
MOST RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTION-  
ATELY DEDICATES IT.



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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE euphonious title of this book lifts into notice the small fact that one and the same letter stands for Browning and for Best. The best of Browning is of the best to be found in English poetry; some would say, with reasons ready in their hearts, the best, in some respects, of uplifting and enkindling literature outside the Bible. With reference to his works the service most needed by the majority, especially of busy people, is that the best be sifted from the rest; we will not say the wheat from the chaff, for nothing he wrote is empty and worthless. Celia Thaxter wrote of Browning, with true discernment, thus: "A man with all his wits about him, 'duly alive and aware.' What vitality in all his words, what splendid power! After all, there is no one quite so satisfying to the human mind, and no one ever wearies of his worthiest speech." In this volume Dr. Mudge aims to render a needed service by sifting out the best, and presenting Browning's "worthiest speech;" a meritorious effort, well directed, skillfully accomplished, and worthy to be applauded and appropriated by a multitude of men and women, most of all by ministers.

Justin McCarthy wrote after the death of Browning: "He is one of the immortals whose place is absolutely settled, and with whom criticism, as such, has no more to do than it has with the height of a mountain or the depth of a lake." It seems likely that criticism, thus warned off and waved aside from measuring Browning, would at least insist, before retiring, on dealing with Mr. McCarthy's statement so far as to say that it is an intellectual blur, quite murky to the mind. For criticism has to do with all things. It is indispensable to sound judgment. Criticism is measurement and estimate by standards, and has to do

alike with ascertaining the height of mountains, depth of lakes, place and rank of authors—including Browning's; which if settled at all will be decided by competent criticism. What Mr. McCarthy means to say is, we surmise, that no criticism, measuring by whatever standards, can deny Browning some place, and a high one, among the great immortals.

Toward the settlement of some questions criticism proceeds by setting up a witness stand and taking affidavits. Power is registered by effects; effects experienced can be testified to. Whatever the elements or secret of Browning's power, the witnesses to its effects are such and so many that its reality is undeniable. Testimony from experience is the most positive proof possible. Effects measure the cause. The force of a projectile is recorded by the mark left where it struck. No visitor to the United States firing grounds at Sandy Hook, looking at a deep dent in the testing plate, denies commensurate momentum and temper to the cannon ball that made it. Quite as presentable and convincing is the evidence of Browning's power furnished by many sorts and conditions of men who have felt its impact upon mind and soul. This introduction may as well be a witness stand, to which may be called a few persons, most of them not before publicly cited, who would be counted competent witnesses in any court, and would willingly respond.

The witness nearest at hand testifies thus : "The first valuable definite discovery I made in reading Browning was that he suited with my mind and feeling when, in their fluctuation up and down, they were at their best; then it was that I found most exquisite delight in him; then his obscurities became intelligible; then his strength and range and mastery were most manifest to me; then I could see how great and lifted up his best is and rejoice in it with exceeding great joy. Moreover, I found that contact with him always rouses me, raises me toward me,

highest possibility, and helps to sustain me there." This witness might have added that to be able to meet Browning on his habitual level we need to come to him at our best; a keen fresh morning mind, and not afternoon ineptitude, is requisite for Browning study.

Dr. Augustus Jessopp testifies that Browning's *Paracelsus* had a wholly incalculable influence on his mind, leaving an impression so deep and lasting that he would find it impossible to exaggerate its effect upon him.

A brilliant and exceptionally cultivated woman, the wife of a western university president, told the writer that while *Saul* is her favorite, as well as the first she knew of Browning, yet *Luria*, also, the first time she read it, put her brain into a state of incandescence and kept her quivering in the centers of emotion for a week with an electric stir of feeling which would not subside.

Mr. Hamilton W. Mabie, including and expounding Browning's *Saul* under the head of "Aids to the Devout Life," records this testimony: "A gifted and ardent woman once said that when everything else failed she reread *Saul*, and then she heard once more the clear tone of faith calling through the darkness as the song of the shepherd boy called to King Saul in the blackness of his despair."

An educated and refined Roman Catholic woman narrated to the writer, a year ago, how, in the darkest and bitterest days of her life, when close after her husband's death came the sudden loss of her only daughter in a tragic and distressing manner, nothing comforted her. In vain her anguished heart and stunned mind gropingly sought help where she had been accustomed to find it. Her Bible and her prayer book seemed to have nothing for her. All words and voices sounded far off, inadequate, irrelevant, meaningless. In that stony deaf-and-dumbness, numbness, almost deadness, she remained, and nothing reached her, until, in such a way and hour as she looked not for, help came to her through Robert Browning. Wearily, listlessly

moving about one day, she picked up a book, opened by chance at *Saul*, read it slowly through, pausing often to think and take its meaning in, and as she read her faith revived from its swoon; there came a sense of Some One carrying her; the spiritual universe grew real, she herself and her lost loved ones a living and immortal part of it she saw it, and from the clear sure vision peace fell upon her and a sweet persuasion that because "God's in his heaven," "all's right with the world."

An eminent Congregational minister in an arduous parish, in life's busy prime, being asked if he took any notice of current poetry, answered: "No; I have not time. I read no poet any more except Browning. I read him for his strong condensation, his dramatic quality, and his immensely tonic vital force."

A justice of the United States Supreme Court, not yet many years dead, was accustomed through life to take with him in his trunk when he went away for the summer two books—the Bible and Shakespeare. In the ripe maturity of later life he discovered Browning and added him to his two previous indispensables, so that, the last summer of his life, when, preparing to depart with his family for the hot season, he went into a bookstore to buy a volume of Browning, he replied to the inquiry of his daughter, "You know I never go away without Browning." What it was he valued most in Browning we do not know, but, for one thing, it is easily conceivable that a great lawyer might desire to carry with him that most subtly, elaborately, and dramatically wrought-out law case, *The Ring and the Book*, in which a legal mind may find a special fascination. Although it may be noted that the interest and profit derivable from study of that tragic case are by no means limited to lawyers, because what Arlo Bates says is true for all who will test it: "To have gone to the heart of *The Ring and the Book*—that most colossal *tour de force* in all literature—to have heard the tender confidences of

## INTRODUCTION.

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d by dying Pompilia, the anguished confession of Caponsacchi, n to the noble soliloquy of the pope, is to have lived through a faith spiritual and emotional experience of worth incalculable." One Other witnesses of like character could easily be called, self but we rest the case and claim a verdict for Browning's it power to move, to hold, and to help.

pon. William D. Howells suggests that "the most valuable his thing Browning has done for poetry is the taking from it of the literary pose and diction, and making it take the attitude and speak the dialect of life." But that is as far from being his greatest service as it is from being his most distinctive and peculiar achievement. Other writings, not a few, in our modern age, owe their effectiveness to being without the literary atmosphere and scholastic manner. Browning's most definite and singular value is rather his invigorating service to the higher life of man, his positive and powerful affirmations in regions measureless and shadowy where human faith and fear often wrestle in the mist; his giving man's spiritual nature the confidence and courage of its own superior dignity. He has illumined problems seldom ventured on by poets, and ranges through a wider variety of subjects than any other, excepting possibly, not certainly, Shakespeare. He surely is what William Watson thinks Longfellow was not—"a puissant singer, of vast voice." No thinker ever faced more squarely with peremptory challenge and resolute, though reverent, intellectual intrepidity the formidable questions of thought and life. Laocoön and his sons did not stretch their sinews more tensely against the tightening serpent folds than Browning bulged his massive muscles against the coils of mystery, doubt, denial, which have disabled and sometimes crushed others, but which could not strangle or hinder him; he sturdily unwound the coils and flung them back into the deep from which they came.

Among Browning's readers gratitude exceeds admiration. To convene a meeting of his creditors would be

difficult, for he was little indebted to any, but a multitude of his debtors confess obligations greater than they can estimate. The needy soul is Browning's best interpreter, as the hungry man best comprehends and relishes food. People who have neither suffered keenly nor felt deeply nor questioned earnestly—whose inner life is pale, dull, inert, vapid, without aspiration, craving, perplexity, or intensity—are disqualified from comprehending and appreciating him. Walter Pater was of opinion that Browning will be read in the future, as now, chiefly as a stimulant to high-heartedness, high hope, and robust assurance. To the writer he seems the mightiest unprofessional, undogmatic, undidactic spiritual force in the Victorian age; an unmatched imparter of inspiration, confidence, energy, decision. Distinctively, preeminently, he is the poet of the soul and its God together—neither one apart, but as meant for and belonging to each other. He never sees a soul without its moral problem and obligation, and never God without man's soul in sight and with the bond and likeness between them visible. Always he is aware of the divine Greatness which lies around our human incompleteness; sees this world of time and sense in the light of another and values both. He affirms and confesses:

This world's no blot for us  
Nor blank ; it means intensely and means good :  
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

And then, seeing always that its meaning points to and prophesies a lasting universe beyond, he joints this flexible, finite life at every point tight into the fixed and infinite.

But for such facts as we have here recited the author of this book would never have taken the pains, or been seized with a desire, to spread abroad more widely the blessings God has given to men through Robert Browning.

WILLIAM VALENTINE KELLEY.

New York City, December, 1897.

# THE BEST OF BROWNING.

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## EXPLANATORY.

"HAVE people nowadays time and patience for thought in rhyme?" If Browning could ask this half a century ago, much more in these still busier years might the query be raised, and serve to give an author or editor pause before exposing, on the troubled sea of publication, to the fickle breath of popular favor, a venture of meditative song. Nevertheless, in spite of commerce and science, in the midst of merchandizing and money-making, the heart of man remains, and there are depths in it that can only be sounded by the plummet of the imagination. Its joys and sorrows, its aspirations and depressions, require a more subtle instrument than the scalpel or the crucible. Although our age may be accounted material and prosaic, poetry cannot be altogether banished from the life that surges through its halls and huts. There are still those who produce this form of literature and those who find in it a never-ceasing source of cheer.

This volume, then, is boldly launched. It has been prepared for those who are not only moved by "the concord of sweet sounds," but are also deeply interested in the more serious side of life. It is an attempt—the first, so far as can be ascertained—to thoroughly introduce Robert Browning to the religious portion of the reading public. He has been correctly called "the great Christian poet of the age," and yet only a small proportion of even intelli-

gent Christians are at all acquainted with his striking contributions to such topics as God, the soul, and the future life. Hitherto there has been no book which puts before the ministry and the laity of the Churches in convenient form that which is really *best* in Browning—his deliverances on the highest themes that can occupy the mind of man. It is these by which he will live the longest and do the most for humanity. These constitute the main part of the weighty and inspiring message which he was charged to deliver to his generation. Busy people cannot well turn over ten or twenty volumes containing thousands of pages in order to find these things. Hence this work has here been done for them. We have made it our aim to furnish the most complete collection possible within moderate compass of all in Browning's poetry that a devout mind would take most pleasure in perusing. We have endeavored to include his most vivid delineations of character, his most beautiful descriptions of natural scenery, and such passages as are most important from a merely literary point of view, but the moral and religious elements decidedly predominate, and we especially recommend the book to these classes.

The three essays that precede the extracts will prepare the reader, it is believed, not only for enjoying the poems that follow, but for going further into the study of the poet if inclination so leads and time is afforded. We advise such, if limited for funds, to procure the Cambridge edition of Browning, containing in very readable type his complete poetic and dramatic works, published at \$3 by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. In that let them read *Pippa Passes*, *The Ring and the Book*, *Dramatic Lyrics*, *Dramatic Romances*, *Dramatic Idylls*, *Dramatis Personæ*, *Men and Women*; also, if they have sufficient leisure, *Pauline*, *Paracelsus*, and the various tragedies. Under some of the other general headings short poems of high worth will be found, but extremely few will be profited by

*Sordello, Aristophanes' Apology, The Agamemnon of Aeschylus, or Pacchiarotto.* We think the world will willingly let die a considerable share of what Browning wrote, and there is no reason why anybody should waste his time in endeavoring to comprehend or enjoy it. Let him rather spend his strength in completely mastering the large amount of unquestionably valuable matter indicated in the titles given above.

In the introductions and notes to the poems in this book we have aimed at the golden mean between explaining too much and too little. Things which moderate reflection or the consultation of a common dictionary will make clear we have not attempted to elaborate; it is not expected that children will undertake Browning. One part of the benefit to come from studying him consists in the mental exercise obtained; one part also of the pleasure. It has been well remarked that the secret of the intense interest he excites in those who have the patience and the power to read him is the sense of possession he awakens. "If we have to eat our own bread in the sweat of our brow, Browning would say that this is precisely what he has been aiming at; without exercise we should have no appetite, no enjoyment of our food, no profit from the eating of it." We would by no means rob the reader of the exquisite satisfaction of discovering for one's self some slightly hidden truth or beauty. We have endeavored to supply all that is really needful for understanding the poet, and to so smooth the path of the traveler in these untried regions that he will not be repelled at the outset, but encouraged to press on to the intellectual feast that awaits him.

For the benefit of such as wish to take up the matter more extensively we append the names of a few of the very best helps for the complete comprehension of Browning. The Boston Browning Society, whose motto was "Earth's Every Man My Friend," collected for the elucidation of the poet some three hundred volumes, now deposited in

the Boston Public Library, where they may be consulted by all.

*Handbook to Robert Browning's Works.* Mrs. Sutherland Orr. Pp. 344. London, 1886.

*Browning Guide-Book.* Geo. Willis Cooke. Pp. 450. Boston, 1891.

*The Browning Cyclopedia. A Guide to the Study of the Works of Robert Browning.* Edward Berdoe. Pp. 572. London, 1892.

*Browning Studies. Select Papers by Members of the Browning Society.* Edited by E. Berdoe. Pp. 331. New York, 1895.

*Introduction to the Study of Browning's Poetry.* Hiram Corson. Boston, 1888.

*Introduction to the Poetry of Robert Browning.* William J. Alexander. Boston, 1889.

*Introduction to the Study of Browning.* Arthur Symons. London, 1886.

*Robert Browning, Chief Poet of the Age.* William G. Kingsland. Pp. 136. London, 1890. Philadelphia, 1891.

*Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher.* Henry Jones. Pp. 369. Glasgow, 1892.

*Browning's Message to His Time.* E. Berdoe. Pp. 222. London, 1890.

*Browning and the Christian Faith.* E. Berdoe. Pp. 231. New York, 1896.

*Poets and Problems.* Geo. Willis Cooke. Boston, 1886.

*Robert Browning—Essays and Thoughts.* John T. Nettleship. Pp. 434. London and New York, 1890.

*Life and Letters of Robert Browning.* Mrs. S. S. Orr. 2 vols. Pp. 634. Boston, 1891.

*Life of Robert Browning.* William Sharp. London and New York, 1890.

*Robert Browning. Personalia.* Edmund Gosse. Pp. 96. Boston, 1896.

*Studies in Literature and Life.* Geo. E. Woodberry. Boston, 1896.

*A Primer in Browning.* F. Mary Wilson.

*The Makers of Modern English.* W. J. Dawson.

*Victorian Poets.* Edmund Clarence Stedman.

*Victorian Poets.* Amy Sharpe.

## BIOGRAPHICAL.

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WE read with peculiar interest the productions of our friends. We long to become friends with those whose words have helped or charmed us, and where personal acquaintance with an author is impossible we crave to know by speech or print the facts of his life and the details of his character. Hence an indispensable introduction to the works of any writer is a biographical sketch of him, made as complete as circumstances permit. And if authors in general require this for the best appreciation of their writings, Browning in particular demands it, since the poet and his poems are linked together by the closest of ties. We present, therefore, a brief portraiture of Robert Browning, and in so doing, it will be our special care to select such features and incidents of his career as will most fully prepare the reader to understand and enjoy the selections that follow.

Although born May 7, 1812, in London, with two generations of Londoners behind him, there was sufficient variety of race on the maternal side (also in part on the other, for his paternal grandmother was a creole) to strengthen the old stock and account somewhat for certain un-English traits in the poet. His mother was half Scotch and half German, her father (Wiedemann by name) being a shipowner from Hamburg who had settled in Dundee. It was from this mother, described by Carlyle as "a true type of the Scottish gentlewoman," that his strong religious bent was chiefly derived. She was born and brought up in the Church of Scotland, like her mother before her, and was a very earnest evangelical Christian, who diligently trained her children for the Lord. Browning's love and reverence for her—he called her "a divine woman"—were most intense.

Even as a grown man he could not sit by her otherwise than with an arm around her waist. His anguish at her death, which occurred in March, 1849, while he was in Italy, was extremely poignant. Her departure was sudden; and his sister greatly fearing, with good reason, that the shock to the poet, if the news were communicated abruptly, would be absolutely fatal, sent him two letters of preparation, saying in the first, "She is not well," and in the second, "She is very ill," when in fact all was over. As it was, it nearly killed him; he became completely prostrated and recovered but slowly. A friend who was in Florence at the time says, "I never saw a man so bowed down in the extremity of sorrow; never." It can easily be understood that the influence of one so venerated, and at the same time so devoted to her Saviour, colored all the poet's days, and made it impossible for him to be otherwise than devout. He is described by his biographer as having been in early years "passionately religious;" and though this feeling became modified later by contact with the world, God was ever the center of all things to him.

His father, Robert—a bank clerk like his father before him, also Robert—was born and bred in the Church of England, but in middle life became by choice a nonconformist, uniting with the Congregationalists; a step which shows that his piety was not of the mere conventional or formal sort, but that he possessed sufficient strength of principle to make some sacrifice for his religion and to take the unpopular side. The poet himself was in no wise ashamed of this same unfashionable ecclesiastical connection. For many years he regularly attended the services of the Rev. Thomas Jones, at the Congregational chapel, Charrington Street, Oakley Square, and after the death of Mr. Jones he wrote a preface to the preacher's published sermons. He had many other warm clerical friends and was never happier than when in their company, for he thoroughly appreciated both their culture and their scrip-

tural faith. In the later years of his life in London he is said not to have been regularly found at church, but he never failed to attend when at the universities or in the country. "The assembling for prayer meant for him," says Mrs. Orr, "something deeper, in both the religious and the human sense, where learning and piety breathed through the consecrated edifice or where only the figurative two or three gathered together within it." "At one time," says Mr. William Sharp, "he took the keenest interest in sectaries of all kinds, and he incurred a gentle reproof from his mother because of his nomadic propensities in search of pastors new. There was even a time when he seriously deliberated whether he should not combine literature and religious ministry, as Faraday combined evangelical fervor with scientific enthusiasm." He doubtless did right in not becoming technically a minister, but he certainly grew to be the most eminent lay preacher of the century.

Robert, senior, by punctual attendance to his business duties and by frugality acquired a comfortable fortune; but his mind was not set on money. His heart was in his books and his family. He collected a large library (six thousand volumes), was a connoisseur in prints, as well as something of a versifier, and a very cheerful, sociable, delightful companion. He was also exceedingly fond of his children, three in all, and gave himself to them without stint. The poet writes thus of his father: "I inherit my vigor of constitution from him. He had a remarkable physique, and he lived to the age of eighty-four without ever having had a day's illness. When I think of so many others who have to struggle with such gigantic difficulties I have very little reason to be proud of my achievements. My path was smoothed for me by my father's assistance. He always had the courage of his convictions, and he sacrificed a fortune to them. He so hated slavery that he left the West Indies on that account."

The poet's education was conducted largely at home. This home was not in the city proper, but in a suburb, Camberwell, where there was at that time plenty of room and near access to the open country. He was very fond of animals, and had numerous pets, among which at various times were owls, monkeys, magpies, hedgehogs, snakes, and toads. He had the free range of his father's books, and the benefit of his father's intelligent direction, intellectual taste, and close companionship. From fourteen to eighteen he had private tutors in the usual branches, including Latin and Greek. Then he studied two years at the London University. He studied music also with able teachers, became well versed in drawing, thoroughly acquainted with French, at home in riding, boxing, and fencing. These, it must be confessed, were no mean attainments; but Italy (and the world of men and women) was really his university, as he was wont to say when asked if he had been at Oxford or Cambridge. It has been suggested, with some reasonableness, that if he had had the advantages of that severe school and university education, including more of logic and mathematics, which as a rule falls to the lot of the upper and middle class young men in England, his work would not show signs of such utter disregard of authority as well as popularity; his never learning to follow the processes of more normally constituted minds probably accounts in part for the involutions and overleapings of thought and phrase which occur in so many of his poems and serve somewhat to alienate the general reader. However that may be, it is quite clear that if he had had to write for a living, or even to devote himself to writing in the intervals of some regular occupation, he could hardly have produced so much, or have produced it with such entire indifference to the public taste and the consequent chances of profit. Thus do our circumstances more or less closely compel us and enter in even to the guidance of genius.

It was for a time an open question whether he should take up for his lifework poetry, painting, sculpture, or music, for all of which he had strong predilections. But poetry conquered. As a boy he "lisped in numbers," and by the time he was twelve he had accumulated a formidable mass of matter, for which he was venturesome enough, and sufficiently self-confident, to seek (without success) a publisher. His mother, however, as was natural, read his verses with pride and showed them to her friends, by which means his abilities were brought to the notice of the Rev. William J. Fox, a Unitarian preacher and man of letters, editor of *The Monthly Repository*, who appreciated the promise of the lad, and afterward proved a most serviceable helper. The true awakening of his genius came, however, when a copy of Shelley fell into his hands, and also a volume of Keats. These poets touched him as Pope and Byron, with whom he was already familiar, had never been able to do, and he began to realize more deeply what his calling of God must be.

To his first publication, *Pauline*, finished in October, 1832, when he was only twenty, he did not append his name, nor did he publicly acknowledge it for more than thirty years. The production contains a large number of very beautiful lines, including a glowing apostrophe to Shelley, whom he twice addresses as "Sun-treader." Two brief quotations will indicate something of the quality of the verse, and also serve to show how, in the very beginning as well as at the close, religion was prominent in his work:

A mortal, sin's familiar friend, doth here  
Avow that he will give all earth's reward,  
But to believe and humbly teach the faith,  
In suffering and poverty and shame,  
Only believing he is not unloved.

I felt as one beloved, and so shut in  
From fear: and thence I date my trust in signs  
And omens, for I saw God everywhere.

In a letter to Mr. T. J. Wise, dated July 6, 1886, the poet says: "To the best of my belief no single copy of the original edition of *Pauline* found a buyer. The book was undoubtedly stillborn, and that despite the kindly offices of many friends, who did their best to bring about a successful birth." It was printed at the expense of a relative, as were also the three succeeding volumes—*Paracelsus*, *Sordello*, *Bells and Pomegranates*—none of which brought any return. *Paracelsus* was issued in 1835, *Strafford* in 1837, *Sordello* in 1840, *Bells and Pomegranates*, No. 1, in 1841. *Strafford*, an historical tragedy, written for the actor, William C. Macready, at his request, was published by the Longmans, but was a failure with the public. Nor did the other dramas which followed during the next few years, until 1846—*Pippa Passes*, *King Victor and King Charles*, *The Return of the Druses*, *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, *Colombe's Birthday*, *Luria*, *A Soul's Tragedy*—prove strong upon the stage, chiefly because he could not limit his thought to the small uses of the actor. Though full of true poetry and containing some great characters, they were too subjective and analytic to be popular. *Pippa*, more than any of the others, has endeared itself to all readers, and is well worthy of close study. Some critics have called it "Browning's masterpiece," "Browning's most perfect work;" and another has said, "It is a parable of the dynamics of character in its most delicate and ethereal action." From it came those lines, "God's in his heaven, All's right with the world," so characteristic of the author's bright philosophy, and so close akin with the psalmist's exhilarating phrase, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice."

He was married to Miss Elizabeth Barrett, September 12, 1846, he being then thirty-four and she forty years of age. The whole story is of the most interesting and romantic nature. His first interview with her, two years before, sealed his fate—and hers. Previous to that time

they had known each other a little through their writings, and being brought together by a mutual friend the attraction was instantaneous and exceeding strong. Pity on his part was a leading element at first. She was a most fragile creature—a nervous invalid, scarce able to leave her couch—and in him, a robust, exuberantly vital man, she awoke at once a deep desire to bring sunshine into the darkened life and throw over her the shield of his protecting care. A removal to Italy, it was believed, would give the invalid a chance to regain some degree of health, but Mr. Barrett, the father, would not consent to her taking the journey with her brother, and he was still more inflexibly opposed to the idea of her marriage—utterly scorning the proposition and positively forbidding it ever to be mentioned to him again. No resource then seeming left but a secret wedding and a hasty flight, she slipped out of the house one day into a neighboring church, and there was married to Mr. Browning, the fact being kept from the family. For a week husband and wife did not see each other. Then, on the 19th, she stole away from her father's house while the family were at dinner, met her husband near by, went with him to Paris and, by slow stages, to Italy. The father and brothers were very angry, and the father, at least—consumed with wrath, arrogant and obstinate—was permanently estranged. He never forgave her, held no communication with her, opened no letter, would not mention her name or even see her child. In spite of her repeated attempts to propitiate—for his unnatural treatment wore upon her—he was unrelenting to the last. And all this ridiculous rage simply because, at the age of forty, she had dared to wound his vanity and go contrary to his whims. She refers to him indirectly not long before her death, in praising Mr. Browning's father. She says, "When *he* is eighty-six, or ninety-six, nobody will be pained or humbled by the spectacle of an insane self-love resulting from a long life's ungoverned will."

The runaway match of this mature pair, in spite of the curses of an unreasonable parent and the misgivings of anxious friends, proved a perfect idyl of bliss. Wordsworth had said on hearing the news: "So Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett have gone off together. Well, I hope they may understand each other; nobody else could." Mrs. Jameson said: "God help them! I know not how the two poet heads and poet hearts will get on through this prosaic world." They got on, as it was soon seen, very well indeed, and understood each other perfectly. A many-sided intellectual sympathy bound them firmly together. With tastes and aims in unison, the music of their days sped on with scarce a jar. "The poem of their married life," as one has said, "was lovelier than any that he or she ever wrote." They seemed made for one another, and joined in a union so complete as to be exceeding beautiful to all beholders. October, 1846, she writes about him: "The intellect is so little in comparison to all the rest, to the womanly tenderness, the inexhaustible goodness, and the high, noble aspiration of every hour. Temper, spirits, manners—there is not a flaw anywhere." And his appreciation of her was equally complete. He had great admiration for her works, declaring that she was the genius, with the true creative power, while he himself was only a painstaking, plodding fellow. But the world has not indorsed this judgment.

A surprising improvement in Mrs. Browning's health manifested itself from the first, and became more marked after the birth of her child. The tender, loving devotion of her husband, bringing constant joy and peace, the new sense of freedom, and the complete change of scene gave her a fresh lease of life. Italy agreed with her well, as it did also with Mr. Browning, and Florence became for the next fifteen years the principal home of the happy pair, diversified by long sojourns in Paris and occasional summers in England. On each visit to London with his wife

the poet commemorated his marriage in a manet all his own—he went to the church in which it had been solemnized and, kneeling, kissed the doorstep.

Their Florentine home was the delight of such visitors as were favored with admission to it. Mr. George S. Hillard writes concerning such a visit: "Mrs. Browning is in many respects the correlative of her husband. As he is full of manly power, so she is a type of the most sensitive and delicate womanhood. . . . I have never seen a human frame which seemed so nearly a transparent veil for a celestial and immortal spirit. She is a soul of fire inclosed in a shell of pearl. . . . Nor is she more remarkable for genius and learning than for sweetness of temper, tenderness of heart, depth of feeling, and purity of spirit. It is a privilege to know such beings singly and separately, but to see their powers quickened and their happiness rounded by the sacred tie of marriage is a cause for peculiar and lasting gratitude." Fanny Kemble said he was the only man whom she had ever known that behaved like a Christian to his wife. As she was obliged by her frailness to keep out of company, he never but once during his fifteen years of married life dined away from home.

It is a pleasure to linger in the contemplation of this ideal wedlock, not very frequent anywhere and especially rare, we fear, among those eminent in literature. All too soon came the summons of separation. The devoted and adored wife died in her husband's arms at Casa Guidi, Florence, June 29, 1861. Throughout the long night of the 28th he sat by the bedside holding her hand. Two hours before dawn she passed into a state of ecstasy, but she still could whisper many words of hope and joy. "With the first light of the new day," says Mr. Sharp, "she leaned against her lover. A while she lay thus in silence, then softly sighing, 'It is beautiful,' passed like the windy fragrance of a flower."

It hardly need be said that he remained unswervingly

true to her memory. To the last of his life her image seemed to be enshrined as deeply in his heart as when he first found her or first lost her. An American traveler who met him on Lake Como in 1878 records that his words concerning her, after the lapse of those seventeen years, were poured forth with all the intensity of a passionate lover. To talk about her, even to a comparative stranger, seemed to afford a relief which could come in no other way to his burdened heart. In his last illness he called every night for the ring his wife had given him on her deathbed and pressed it to his lips before he went to sleep; and he has left very many tokens in his poems of the depth and permanence of his feeling for her. The two volumes which he published in 1855, containing some fifty poems under the general title *Men and Women*, were dedicated to her, and she is directly addressed in the final song, called "One Word More," beginning as follows:

"There they are, my fifty men and women  
Naming me the fifty poems finished!  
Take them, Love, the book and me together:  
Where the heart lies let the brain lie also."

We must not quote the many beautiful things which he wrote of and to her in other places. The best known are found in *Prospecte* (composed in the autumn after her death), *My Star*, the invocation at the close of the first part of *The Ring and the Book*, beginning "O lyric Love," and *By the Fireside*. In the latter occur the lines:

"My perfect wife, my Leonor,  
O heart, my own, O eyes, mine too,  
Whom else could I dare look backward for;  
With whom beside should I dare pursue  
The path gray heads abhor?"

During the fifteen years of his married life—which, as may easily be understood, had very many distractions, from the constant change of residence made necessary by the invalid's needs and from a variety of domestic cares—

Browning's poetic productions, though of a high grade, were comparatively few. But when at length he was released from the close attention which the state of his wife's health had required, and the many sacrifices which he had so cheerfully made on her behalf were no longer necessary, he applied himself with unusual diligence to his vocation, and much of his best work came out in the decade immediately following. This characterization must be emphatically given to that wonderful creation, *The Ring and the Book*, the first of whose four volumes appeared in 1868, and the chief character of which (Pompilia) was clearly conceived under the inspiration of the memory of his departed companion, to whom, indeed, the whole poem has been accounted in some respects a monument. And to this same period belong those other masterpieces, *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *A Death in the Desert*.

The death of his father, in 1866, increased the loneliness in which he was left by the previous bereavement, and after this he and his sister Sarianna, who had spent her life in devotion to her parents, became inseparable. England was chiefly their home, but they passed many summers in Brittany, and now and then returned to Italy, where his son, Robert Barrett Browning, was finally established at Venice as a painter.

Perhaps the most notable event in the closing period of his life was the formation of the Browning Society, founded (of course without the slightest suggestion on his part) by Dr. F. J. Furnivall and Miss E. H. Hickey, in 1881, at which time the poet's works were by no means widely read in England, though they had secured a great number of earnest students in America. It was an occurrence entirely unique in the history of literature, this establishment of an association for the study and popularization of an author's works during his own lifetime, and it undoubtedly pleased the poet much. He had lived for the larger portion of his poetic life under a cloud of critical hostility and obloquy,

all of which, as Mr. G. W. Smalley, writing from London after his death, remarks, "he had borne stoutly and for the most part silently, adhering through evil report and good report to the faith that was in him." His fame had been of extremely slow growth. "My publishers," he once said, "know just how many copies of a new book they can sell, and they print so many, no more, no less." Almost everybody berated his obscurity, and most people resented the demand he made upon them for close thought. The Browning Society was instituted to remove, so far as possible, some of the difficulties which his peculiar style placed in the way of his wide acceptance and comprehension by the general public. Dr. Furnivall thus speaks of the relations between the poet and this band of his devoted admirers:

"Browning kept clear of our Society, and we kept clear of him. But when we could not understand a passage or a poem I either walked over or wrote to him and got his explanation of it. At first I did not take the volume with me, and he amused me very much by saying, 'Pon my word, I don't know what I *did* mean by the poem. I gave away my last copy six years ago, and have not seen a line of it since. But I will borrow a copy to-morrow and look at it again. If I do not write before Sunday come to lunch and I will tell you about it.' So I got up a subscription and on his seventieth birthday, May 7, 1882, sent him a handsomely bound set of his own works in an oak case carved with bells and pomegranates, and with this inscription in the volumes: 'To Robert Browning on his seventieth birthday, May 7th, 1882, from some members of the Browning Societies of London, Oxford, Cambridge, Bradford, Cheltenham, Cornell, and Philadelphia, with heartfelt wishes for his long life and happiness. These members having ascertained that the works of a great modern poet are never in Robert Browning's house when need is to refer to them, beg him to accept a set of these works, which

they assure him will be found worthy of his most serious attention.' On two points I often used to attack him: (1) That he would not order his publishers to bring out a shilling selection from his works, and get him the wide popularity I knew was his due. But he would not interfere; his publishers were to judge. (2) That he would not put an argument before each of his poems, like Shakespeare, Spencer, and Milton did. He said: No, he would not. He did not make us buy his poems; we could let him alone if we liked, he did not care; but if we did buy 'em, we must take 'em as he chose to print 'em, and if he had taken the trouble to write 'em, we surely might take the trouble to look up historical facts."

This quotation well illustrates the sturdy independence and essential manhood of the poet. He bowed the knee to none but God. He paid extremely little attention to detractors. He never answered his critics or thought it worth while to deny the fictions which were printed about him. He agreed with Rubens, who said, "My maxim is to do well, and you will make others envious; do better, and you will master them." There are indications that he felt keenly at times the long-drawn desolateness of his early and middle life as a literary man, but it certainly never soured him or took aught away from his cheerful hope. He had the unconquerable spirit of perpetual youth and faith and love. He kept his inner sensibilities fresh and open. None of his instincts grew old. None of his ideals vanished, nor did one of his enthusiasms lose its heat. His robust health of body and his exceptionally favorable circumstances throughout life were no doubt important factors in the superb faith he constantly exhibited and the cheeriness he always showed. The processes of his mind were delightfully direct. He was scornful of all morbidness. He made short work of cobwebs. He hated cant. He had true sentiment without a tinge of sentimentiality. As Dr. A. H. Strong has said, "Out of his

books there blows a healthful breeze, as from the woods and the hills, to brace up and reinvigorate a literature that was fast becoming finical and *dilettante*. And I think I am not mistaken in saying that much of the modern progress toward direct and sensible speech, both in the pulpit and the press, is to be attributed to the healthful influence of Robert Browning." There was indeed no mawkishness about him. There is a story that Swinburne, when he first met Browning, refused to take the chair that was offered him and insisted upon sitting on a hassock at the master's feet. The story goes on to relate that when Swinburne took his departure the master indulged in what the lower classes of London call "language."

Mr. Hillard writes of him, in 1847: "His countenance is so full of vigor, freshness, and refined power that it seems impossible to think that he can ever grow old. His poetry is subtle, passionate, and profound, but he himself is simple, natural, and playful. He has the repose of a man who has lived much in the open air, with no nervous uneasiness and no unhealthy self-consciousness." Writing at an earlier date, Macready says he looked more a poet than any man he had ever met. His head was crowned with wavy, dark-brown hair. He had singularly expressive eyes, a sensitive, mobile mouth, a musical voice, and an alertness of manner so that he was like a quivering, high-bred animal. Mrs. Orr says of him at twenty-three that he was slim and dark and very handsome, a trifle of a dandy, full of ambition, eager for success, determined to conquer and achieve. He had a fine head and a noble, leonine countenance.

Strength and brightness characterized the man as well as his verse. "His entrance into a room," says Mr. Smalley, writing of his latest years, "filled it with sunshine. He had more manners than is usual with Englishmen—long residence abroad had left its mark upon him, and he had adopted some habits from his beloved

Italy. He was quite free from all the little vanities and irritabilities in which lesser authors indulge themselves, but he set a just value on his position and on the various recognitions of it which came to him. He was in all essential things perfectly simple and genuine, transparently so sometimes. He had spent his life in loyalty to an ideal, and, whatever may be thought of the ideal, the loyalty and sincerity of the man are beyond praise."

"I asked him once," says Mr. Kingsland, "'Were you never discouraged at the indifference of the public and the hostility of the critics to your writings?' 'Never,' was his emphatic reply. 'Why, I had the approbation of Fox, and Mill, and Foster, and was content with their verdict.'" He greatly prized the intelligent sympathy of the few whom he accounted best able to understand him. In their sunshine, their enthusiastic applause, he basked—to them he opened his heart. But in the presence of those who misunderstood he could but shut himself up with a touch of hardness and reserve which was only the natural response to their attitude. He was red with warm blood to the very center of his being—human to the core. He was essentially social, delighting in society and carrying an exquisite gayety into every social gathering. He was a brilliant talker, but he never willingly monopolized the conversation, and he seldom or never talked about himself or his writings, nor did he care to go where public readings were given from them. His flow of speech was constant and vehement; no subject came amiss to him, he was armed at every point. He sparkled with wit and wisdom; was the very image of intellectual vigor and a mine of literary learning. "There was no arrogance of manner, no air of conscious superiority," says one; "he was so full of thought and of life that he could not help talking."

Human kind interested him greatly. The whole world was to him full of vague possibilities of friendship. He

enjoyed watching the pageant of existence. He liked to scan countenances in a crowd, and to exchange words with those of high and low degree. There was a magnetism to be absorbed, he said, in mingling with a number of human beings. It was a part of his large optimism and his splendid self-sufficient physical temperament that he made acquaintance easily. And his friendships with the few were very strong. "In parting with him once, he said to me," writes a lady, "'Remember, wherever you are, if you need me, send for me; I would go to the ends of the earth to serve you.'" "There was an element of the godlike," says this admirer, "in the completeness and tenderness of his love for those whom he held closest which made him seem to them at times as if he were of more than mortal mold, yet he made no such pretension." No; and Mr. Edmund Gosse, in a lecture on Browning, whom he knew well, decidedly deprecates this exaggerated worship which some have been disposed to indulge in. He says: "I would not break the idol of Browning which you have raised in your hearts, but I would try to persuade you to reduce it to reasonable proportions. He was an uplifted spirit, all of him enlisted on the side of what was splendid and enthusiastic in mankind. But do not be induced to think of him as a sort of Veiled Prophet, fraught with mystic theologies. He was an honest man of genius, doing the best that he could in an art that he revered and loved—a man like ourselves, only of larger genius and a richer pulse of vitality." "No man," said Mr. Gosse, on another occasion, "ever showed a more handsome face to private friendship. No one disappointed or repelled less. No one upon intimate acquaintance required less to be apologized for or explained away."

He led, in the last years of his life, when fame had come to him and his marvelous versatility made him the most charming of companions, a semipublic life. He was in demand in all directions, for all sorts of functions. Mr.

William Sharp sums it up thus: "Everybody wished him to come and dine; and he did his utmost to gratify everybody. He saw everything; read all the notable books; kept himself acquainted with the leading contents of the journals and magazines; conducted a large correspondence; read new French, German, and Italian books of mark; read and translated Euripides and Æschylus; knew all the gossip of the literary clubs, salons, and the studios; was a frequenter of afternoon tea parties; and then, over and above it, he was Browning—the most profoundly subtle mind that has exercised itself in poetry since Shakespeare."

It was a part of his true manliness and fearlessness that he had a genuine godliness and no concern about death. "Death!" he said once to Mr. Sharp, "Death! It is this harping on death I despise so much; this idle and often cowardly as well as ignorant harping. Why should we not change like everything else? Death is life, just as our daily, our momentarily dying body is none the less alive, and ever recruiting new forces of existence. Without death, which is our crape-like, churchyard word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. For myself, I deny death as an end of anything. Never say of me that I am dead."

Very interesting and every way important to those who would form an acquaintance with the best side, the religious side, of the poet's life, is a letter which he sent to a dying lady who had written to thank him for the help she had received from his poems, mentioning particularly *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Abt Vogler*, and giving expression to the deep satisfaction of her mind that one so highly gifted with genius should hold, as Browning held, the great truths of our religion and a belief in the glorious unfolding and crowning of life in the world beyond the grave. The letter was published in *The Nonconformist* just after the poet's death, and is reprinted in the *Transactions of the*

*Browning Society.* On account of its peculiar significance we give it here entire:

" 19 WARWICK CRESCENT, May 11, 1876.

" DEAR FRIEND: It would ill become me to say a word as to my own feelings except inasmuch as they can be common to us both in such a situation as you describe yours to be, and which by sympathy I can make mine by the anticipation of a few years at most. It is a great thing, the greatest, that a human being should have passed the probation of life and sum up its experience in a witness to the power and love of God. I dare congratulate you. All the help I can offer in my poor degree is the assurance that I see ever more reason to hold by the same hope—and that by no means in ignorance of what has been advanced to the contrary. And for your sake I could wish it to be true that I had so much of 'genius' as to permit the testimony of an especially privileged insight to come in aid of the ordinary argument. For I know I myself have been aware of the communication of something more subtle than a ratiocinative process when the convictions of 'genius' have thrilled my soul to its depths, as when Napoleon, shutting up the New Testament, said of Christ, 'Do you know that I am an understander of men? Well, he was no man.' Or, as when Charles Lamb—in a gay fancy with some friends as to how he and they would feel if the greatest of the dead were to appear suddenly in flesh and blood once more—on the final suggestion, 'And if Christ entered this room,' changed his manner at once and stammered out, as his manner was when moved, 'You see, if Shakespeare entered we should all rise; if *He* appeared we must kneel.' Or, not to multiply instances, as when Dante wrote, what I will transcribe from my wife's Testament wherein I wrote it fourteen years ago: 'Thus I believe, thus I affirm, thus I am certain it is, that from this life I shall pass to another better, there where that lady lives of whom my soul was enamored.' Dear Friend,

I may have wearied you in spite of your good will. God bless you, sustain and receive you. Reciprocate this blessing with  
Yours affectionately,

"ROBERT BROWNING."

In full harmony with this frank and glowing testimony as to the future is the fact that, when a lady asked him to write in her album something from *Rabbi Ben Ezra* he wrote:

"All that is, at all,  
Lasts ever, past recall ;  
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure."

It has been well said that the line near the close of *La Saisiaz*,

"He at least believed in Soul, was very sure of God,"

might fitly stand as his epitaph. He believed most firmly in the "Over Soul," in a direct controlling Providence, and this belief gave him the "acquiescent tendency" noticed by some of his friends; led him, as a rule, to make the best of external conditions rather than seek to change them. It led him also, as it has done some others of earth's noblest, to make a virtue of happiness. He certainly enjoyed life to the full. In *The Two Poets of Croisic* he declares that, other conditions being equal, the greater poet will have been he who led the happier life and triumphed with the more completeness over suffering. He read few things with so much pleasure as an occasional chapter in the Old Testament. There was no quality he so loved and admired as truth. He thought aloud whenever he could trust himself to do so. "He was capable," says Mrs. Orr, "of the largest self-sacrifice and the smallest self-denial, and exercised either whenever love or duty clearly pointed the way. He would, he believed, cheerfully have done so at the command, however arbitrary, of a higher power. The evangelical Christian and the subjective idealistic philosopher were curiously blended in his composition." "His

orthodoxy," says Moncure D. Conway, "brought him into many a conflict with rationalistic friends, some of whom could hardly believe that he took his doctrine seriously. Such was the fact, however." And a fact of large significance in the world of letters.

It only remains to add a little as to some of his habits of work, and then to indicate the closing scene. All his life long, as he himself once remarked, he never knew what it was to have to do a certain thing to-day and not to-morrow, and he thought that this had led to superabundance of production, since in his unfettered leisure he had been afraid to do nothing. His wife often complained of him that he waited for inclination, and worked by fits and starts. For a time he thought he could not do otherwise. But later he worked with more regularity and system. After his wife's death he bent himself more energetically to labor. In 1863 he says, "I wrote a poem yesterday of one hundred and twenty lines, and mean to keep writing whether I like it or not." In 1864 he says, "I feel much comfort and delight in doing the best I can with my object in life, poetry." There were several times when he made a resolve to do a poem a day, and once he succeeded in this purpose for a fortnight. Of course this could not last, but he always counted a day lost when he had not written something. It was his constant conviction that his latest work must be his best, because the outcome of the fullest mental experience and of the largest practice in his art. He was keenly alive to the necessary failings of youthful literary production, and perhaps not sufficiently aware of other failings that advancing years are apt to bring, for most readers find a decided falling off in the quality of his work in later life. Thought gained ascendancy over emotion, and his increased command of words made him too diffuse. He produced less rapidly in later life, and he was glad to have accomplished twenty or thirty lines in a morning.

His facility in verse making, during most of his days very great, was often made a means of entertaining his most intimate friends. Mrs. Clara J. Bloomfield Moore, in a paper read before the Boston Browning Society, says: "I once opened a letter from George Bancroft in Mr. Browning's presence, in which the historian mentioned the near approach of his eighty-seventh birthday. I proposed to the poet that he should write a message from himself which I would cable. Almost as quick as thought he wrote:

" 'Bancroft, the message-bearing wire,  
Which flashes my all-hail to-day,  
Moves slowlier than the heart's desire  
That what hand pens tongue's self might say.' "

Miss Maria S. Porter, in her *Recollections of Robert Browning*, says that on seeing in her autograph album a translation from the Italian, which Longfellow had written, to wit,

"The soul where love abideth not resembles  
A house by night without or fire or torch,"

Browning exclaimed, "Longfellow did not make the rhyme. I'll try my hand at it." And immediately he wrote,

"What seems a soul where Love's outside the porch?  
A house by night with neither fire nor torch,"

saying gleefully, "I've done it! There's my rhyme!"

He never, or almost never, wrote for periodicals, breaking his rule only two or three times to especially favor some friend or some good cause. In this he was totally unlike his wife, who especially enjoyed appearing in papers and magazines. Upon being urged by an American author, Mrs. Moulton, to send a poem for a Boston weekly, he replied: "If I could write in that way for anyone, I would consider this request from Boston; but I simply cannot. An English magazine recently offered me a large price for a poem, which I refused; then a still larger, which I again

refused. Then they sent me a blank check and asked me to fill it out to my own satisfaction; but I returned that also. I cannot bring myself to write for periodicals. If I publish a book and people choose to buy it, that proves that they want to read my work. But to have them turn over the pages of a magazine and find me—that is to be an uninvited guest. My wife liked it. She said she liked to be with the others; but I have steadily refused that kind of thing from first to last."

The end—or shall we call it the beginning?—came in 1889. While at his son's home in Venice, busy with negotiations for the purchase of a residence in Asolo, a place he long had loved and from which he named his last volume of poems, *Asolando*, he was taken ill with bronchial troubles, and these soon became complicated with a weakness of the heart which had existed for some time. Though tended with the utmost care he steadily grew weaker, and when the 12th of December was reached it became evident to those around that he could not outlast the day. "But weak as he was," says Mr. Sharp, "he yet did not see the shadow which had begun to chill the hearts of the watchers. Shortly before the great bell of San Marco struck ten he turned and asked if any news had come concerning *Asolando*, published in London that day. His son read him a telegram from the publishers, telling how great the demand was and how favorable were the advance articles in the leading papers. The dying poet smiled, and murmured, 'How gratifying!' When the toll of St. Mark's had left a deeper silence than before, those by the bedside saw a yet profounder silence on the face of him whom they loved." It is a pleasing reflection that the heart of the great man who had so generously given himself to his fellows was made glad at the final moment by the thought that he was loved in return. Italy would fain have given him burial place, and perhaps he himself would have preferred to lie beside his darling in Florence, but England

claimed first right; and so he was laid to rest in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey on the last day of the year 1889.

"The great Christian poet of the century," is what Dean Farrar has called him. "First among modern English poets," says M. Taine, the famous French critic. "The poet of humanity," "poet of the future," "poet of culture and of strong souls," "poet of the moral sense and of the spiritual faculty in man," "the poet's poet," "of all poets the healthiest and the manliest," "subtlest asserter of the soul in song," are other titles which he fairly won. "Pure, virile, versatile, balanced, profound," says Dr. William A. Quayle, "erudite, unsullied with base desire or impure motive, in aspiration outsoaring eagles, in life beautiful as any ideal ever dreamed, in amplitude of thought swinging across the world, in labors abundant beyond Shakespeare, in character Christian, in faith triumphant." He never failed in his belief in man nor lost his hold on God. He was thoroughly tolerant, yet terribly in earnest. He liked to emphasize the kernel of religiousness in irreligious people, and to show up the frequent irreligiousness of the religious. Called "the latest extant Defender of the Faith," he took his own way of defending it, and was by no means conventional in his manner of belief. He restated the old truths of Christianity in the language of the nineteenth century. He was a great-hearted, great-minded leader, ever teaching the world lessons of dauntless courage, sublime faith, and deathless love. We who have learned to drink large inspirations from his words are especially glad to know that he was not himself false to them in his life; that the man is even greater than the poet; and that in the unseen glory which he greeted with a cheer we may expect to see him robed in eternal light and dowered with immortal song.

## HOW TO READ BROWNING.

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To get the most from Browning it is well to have at the outset a fairly full and clear conception as to his defects no less than his excellencies. Then one will understand how to take him; will know what to look for and will not be disappointed. He is not like other poets. He is unique, original, thoroughly unconventional, and absolutely independent; quite a new species of the general genus. And the fact that a person enjoys the common kind of poetry does not necessarily mean that he will become enthusiastic over Browning, who has created a poetry which is entirely his own. Indeed, if one is very strongly attached to the more usual sort, it is at least highly probable that he will at first decidedly resent the demand made upon him for so great an alteration of his ideal. Just as, in music, he who has been worshiping at the shrine of Beethoven or Rossini will find it difficult to comprehend the fascination which Wagner has for his votaries; and as, in prose literature, he who has been brought up on Washington Irving and Lord Macaulay will stand aghast at the innovations and inventions of Carlyle—so the intense admirers of Tennyson and Longfellow, who have been taught to believe that these represent the highest style of the genuine poetic afflatus, will be disposed to deny that Browning can be placed in the first rank. For, like Wagner and Carlyle, Browning puts emphasis on strength rather than beauty, and mingles many discords with his harmony; whereby he greatly offended the critics, particularly in the earlier days before he had conquered his place and compelled them to modify their inane verdict. They called him the poet of the opaque and of the grotesque. They took umbrage at the harshness of his consonantal combi-

nations, at his odd, uncouth rhymes, his infelicitous captions, and at what they termed the jerky, ugly, faulty workmanship conspicuous in many of his poems. Having been accustomed to insist that melodious verse was the *sine qua non* with every true poet, they could not make up their minds all at once to accept as such one who was often so rugged and jagged, so apt to startle his readers by some sudden shock, or surprise them by an unexpected pelting with words that were curious and quaint. They did not enjoy being so jolted in their journey by abrupt transitions; they preferred to travel over smooth and even roads which made less demand upon their nerves. So they declared he was not artistic; for the primary concern of the artist, said they, is with the vehicle of conveyance, the form of expression, whereas this man puts distinctly first the thought to be conveyed and makes art secondary. They affirmed that in mental arrogance and scorn of authority he had insulted Beauty herself, and was either absolutely incapable of expressing his mind in rhythmic music, or out of mere caprice and perversity refused to pay this tribute to the acknowledged standards of highest excellence. In short, the critics in poetry found him as decidedly a disturber of their theories, and as difficult to deal with, as the critics in the art of war found Napoleon.

They also dwelt at great length on his obscurity. This charge, in so far as a good deal that the poet wrote is concerned, must be frankly admitted. *Sordello*, for example—and this, though probably the worst of its class, does not stand altogether alone—has been called, with some degree of justice, “a melancholy waste of human power,” “a derelict upon the ocean of poetry,” “a magnificent failure.” Tennyson—with whom Browning had the pleasantest of personal relations, dedicating to him one of his volumes with the words, “In poetry illustrious and consummate, in friendship noble and sincere”—tried to read *Sordello*, and in bitterness of spirit declared that “there

were only two lines in it which he understood, and they were both lies." He referred to the opening and closing lines: "Who will may hear Sordello's story told," and "Who would has heard Sordello's story told." Carlyle said, "My wife has read through *Sordello* without being able to make out whether Sordello was a man, a city, or a book." M. Odysse Barot, in an article on this poem in a French magazine, quotes the poet as saying, "God gave man two faculties," and adds, "I wish, while he was about it, God had supplied another—the power to understand Mr. Browning." Douglas Jerrold, when slowly convalescing from a serious illness, found among some new books sent him by a friend a copy of *Sordello*. A few lines put him in a state of alarm. Sentence after sentence brought no consecutive thought to his brain. At last the idea occurred to him that in his illness his mental faculties had been wrecked. The perspiration rolled from his forehead, and smiting his head he sank back upon the sofa, crying, "O God, I am an idiot!" A little later, when his wife and sister entered, he thrust *Sordello* into their hands, demanding what they thought of it. He watched them intently while they read. When at last Mrs. Jerrold remarked, "I don't understand what this man means; it is gibberish," her delighted husband gave a sigh of relief and exclaimed, "Thank God, I am *not* an idiot!"

This acknowledged lack of clearness springs from a variety of causes. It is not the result of slovenliness and want of pains; much less does it arise from any deliberate intention to project puzzles. It came about very largely from the natural peculiarities of his mind, increased by the irregularities of his education, and also by the instinctive defiance of that public opinion which his best efforts in the earlier part of his career had failed to conciliate. Popular sympathy, by bringing him nearer to the masses, would have corrected a defect which coldness augmented and then hardened into habit. His obscurity is partly due to the

monologue form which he so largely adopted—and to which one has to become accustomed gradually, for it is rarely found in other writers—and partly also it is the result of severe economy of expression, the omission of words that would, in prose and by some poets, be fully set down, and the turning of clauses from their natural order. Pronouns, articles, conjunctions, and prepositions are quite often left out; the infinitive is frequently used without the preposition; the relative, in its nominative and its accusative form, is in many instances suppressed; the indirect object, or dative, is employed without *to* or *for*; and one has to judge from the context alone whether the verb is in the past subjunctive or past indicative.

And partly the obscurity is attributable to the strength of the thought and the nature of the subjects taken in hand, as well as to the method of their treatment. This treatment is subjective rather than objective; philosophical, not descriptive. It is evident that nature serves this author chiefly as a background for his men and women. He has fewer delineations by far than dissertations and disquisitions. Hence a concentration of mind is needed such as mere description cannot call for, and the reader finds himself confronted, because of an almost painfully close succession of thought, with a demand for a sustained attention which is very discouraging to the superficial. He has to summon up all his powers and be alive at as many points as possible. He has to supply in his reading many connecting links where the rapid-moving mind of the poet has jumped a chasm. It is not everyone who has sufficient force of intellect or vividness of imagination to follow him; it is not everyone who can pounce upon truth with such impetuous leaps and bounds, or dart with such agility from point to point. His keen, swift brain almost eludes pursuit. Very many of his lines are too crowded for the best effect. The thought is so concentrated that it needs considerable solution before the reader can fairly get the good

of it. He can scarcely make his way through the involved tangle of endless sentences saturated with perpetual suggestiveness. It is "dark with excess of light." If one is not extremely alert he does not catch the meaning of some quickly passing reference, and so he loses a portion of the picture which is being painted. There are also many parentheses and side excursions, and many allusions, historical, biographical, and local, not easily followed by a reader at a distance, or by anyone not familiar with the vast variety of sources whence the poet's stores of information on every sort of subject were being constantly filled. Moreover, spiritual truths need more or less of spirituality for their comprehension, just as intellectual truths need intellect, and so it is inevitable that this most intellectual and most spiritual of poets should not be widely popular, and should require much study. For these various reasons most of Browning's poems need to be read several times before their full beauty and power can be felt. At the first reading, such is the close dependence of the parts on the whole, there will be perhaps only a general confused notion of what it is all about; but if the reader perseveres the confusion will clear up, and he will find it well worth while to have kept on till the difficulties were conquered and the rich depths below the surface penetrated. It is the sort of poetry to make people think, not yielding its full meaning to the cursory glance of a half-roused mind; yet, of course, in the great body of it there is not a little which is plain enough to any careful reader of ordinary intelligence.

Another admission must be made by those who love Browning much but truth more, and that is the great inequality of the work he did. But this is only to admit, after all, that he was a man, for every writer's work is unequal. Browning's undoubtedly was. No one can fail to notice that much of the hastily improvised and somewhat commonplace blank verse which he poured forth so volubly and voluminously is a comparatively sterile region,

with an occasional dreary waste. It could hardly be otherwise, considering the vast mass of his production—over one hundred thousand lines, a larger number of words than there are in the Bible. Only a small proportion of these lines will linger in the memory, or be accounted to rise above a pretty ordinary level. It is not given to any man to write a great deal that will permanently live, or even make much impression beyond his own generation. Much that is excusable or even laudable in a contemporary book will be unreadable in a quarter of a century. Browning, no more than Shakespeare, or any other mortal, keeps continually on the high plane that in moments of special inspiration he easily reaches. There is an alloy of prose in all the versified tales which his facility in words tempted him to spin out to such prodigious lengths. His short poems contain his most flawless poetry, but in all the longer ones there are many gems of purest water that can readily be rescued from the surrounding dross. Hence the inevitable necessity of selection for nearly all. Few of us, in the pressure of life, can afford to give our time to anything but the best. We must neglect much that is merely good, or simply better than the average, that we may the more fully absorb that rare residuum of permanent value which can be read again and again and again, with ever-increasing pleasure and profit. Such a residuum, it is needless to say, Browning most certainly affords, and it is believed that a very important section of it is presented in the following pages.

The friends of Browning—such as are judicious, and careful to avoid that reaction in public sentiment which over-adulation always produces—by no means claim for him the possession of all excellencies. They own his scanty attention to beauty, his occasional prolixity, diversified by too much compression, his frequent obscurity, and the great inequality of his work. But, as to the first item of this indictment, they feel that the fault, if it be a

fault, needs but little excuse, since it has proceeded from a lofty quality. If he neglected beauty it has been because he deemed truth and strength of more importance, and has been exceedingly occupied with significance and sense. The man in him was greater than the artist, and we must pronounce it a brave sin. It is undoubtedly true that the very things which have mainly caused his failure to acquire large acceptance with the masses have particularly endeared him to the smaller number who see in these things a rare nobility. His independence, faith in himself, ability to say concerning criticisms, "None of these things move me," unwillingness to court temporary popularity, readiness to wait with entire calmness the verdict of the future, have greatly impressed those capable of appreciating this high cast of soul. His appeal has been to the best part of the best natures, and the first men of the age, those who lead the world of thought, have found in him an inspiring force.

"The significance of Browning in literature," says the Rev. W. J. Dawson, D.D., "is that he is a strong, resolute believer and teacher who, amid the sick contortions of a doubting generation, has abated no jot of heart or hope. He has had the courage of his originality in creating his own style. He has had the courage of individuality in resisting the agnostic tendencies of his time, and amid the dismayed and doubtful has consistently delivered a testimony of hope. The songs of mere loveliness charm us for a while, but it is the outpouring and upsoaring of the strong minds of humanity which become the real marching songs of the race in the long run."

Miss Dorothea Beale says: "We love Browning for his great thoughts and high enthusiasm, for his faith in God and man and woman. We thank him for the comfort and strength he has given us. He has enriched our sympathies, assured us in failure and disappointment, helped us to understand the meaning of life. He is cheerful and opti-

mistic. The unseen is ever present to him. He is ever conscious of the double life and of the divine presence. The visible universe is but a veil. Christian teaching interpenetrates all his thoughts."

Mr. William Sharp, writing of our debt to Browning, remarks: "The influence he exercises through his best short poems is not to be looked for in individuals only, but in the whole thought of the age which he has molded to new forms, animated anew, and to which he has imparted a fresh stimulus. He has enriched our English literature with a new wealth of poetic diction, has added to it new symbols, has enabled us to inhale a more liberal air, and has above all raised us to a fresh standpoint, a standpoint involving our construction of a new definition."

Miss Whitehead says: "He invigorates those who turn to him for solace and refreshment, sends them back to their post with a hope that the battle may yet be retrieved, or, if it seems lost, that apparent defeat may only mean a surer victory."

Professor Henry Jones calls him "the high priest of our age, standing at the altar for us, giving utterance to our needs and aspirations, our fears and faith. By understanding him we shall to some degree understand ourselves and the power which is silently molding us to its purpose. He is the interpreter of our time, reflecting its confused strength and chaotic wealth."

Miss F. Mary Wilson writes: "To many people his works are the literary evangel of a reasonable Christianity. He restates in language appropriate to our age the need and fitness and inevitableness of two correlative beings, the soul and God. He takes them as self-evident, and the knowledge of them as intuitive. The soul is with him the fundamental fact of life, the basis of his philosophy. There is something very sustaining to a weaker faith in the unfaltering vigor of Browning's. In the very uncertainty of the unseen he finds the firmest evidence of its truth."

"He won his audience finally," says Mr. George Edward Woodberry, "by this fact, that he had something to say that was ethical and religious. The higher interests of man predominated in his work. Life is the stuff to make the soul of, he says. He asserts the equal and identical opportunity in all to develop the soul. Whatever the soul seeks it should seek with all its might. He places great value on strength of character, vitality in life, resolution, courage, and the braving of consequences."

Mr. Hamilton W. Mabie says: "No English poet ever demanded more of his readers, and none has ever had more to give them. Since Shakespeare no maker of English verse has seen life on so many sides, entered into it with such intensity of sympathy and imagination, and pierced it to so many centers of its energy and motivity. No other has so completely mastered the larger movement of modern thought on the constructive side, or so deeply felt and so adequately interpreted the modern spirit."

"As no other has done in the last quarter of a century," says Mr. George Willis Cooke, "Browning has asserted the eternal reality of the soul as the most vital truth which can come within the ken of man. As a poet Browning can afford us little pleasure in his more thoughtful poems. These are for persons who seek guidance on the way of life, and guidance satisfactory for thought. To these he comes with refreshment and a strong arm for support. He gives courage, high aims, and a clear vision. His words are often like battle strokes. In all the years of the present century no one has sent forth into the world words on the questions of religion more needful or more likely to help than those of Robert Browning. They fix the desires and purposes of life on the central things, and they help to gain a faith which is higher than sight!"

"Browning's poetry," says Professor Hiram Corson, "embodies the profoundest thought; the subtlest, most complex sentiment; and, above all, the most quickening

spirit of the age. He is most like Shakespeare in his deep interest in human nature in all its varieties of good and evil. He makes strong protest against mere intellect. It is the human heart which is to him the subject of the deepest, most scrutinizing interest. He takes for his subject the soul itself, its shifting fancies and celestial lights. He has worked with a thought and passion capital greater than that of any of his contemporaries. He always treats the soul as supernatural, as something destined to gravitate toward the infinite. The present life is a tabernacle life, and only can be truly lived as such. The soul must rest in nothing this side the infinite."

Said Mr. Kirkman, in his introductory address at the founding of the Browning Club in London, October 28, 1881: "Browning is undoubtedly the profoundest intellect, with widest range of sympathies and with universal knowledge of men and things, that has arisen as a poet since Shakespeare. He is preeminently the greatest Christian poet we have ever had. Not in a narrow, dogmatic sense, but as a teacher who is as thrilled through with all Christian sympathies as with artistic or musical. He is the poet of thoughtful persons, essentially the exponent of the best movements of English mind in this age."

President Augustus Hopkins Strong, of Rochester Theological Seminary, in warmly commanding Robert Browning "to all preachers and theologians as well as to all thoughtful Christian people," says: "He is the most learned, stirring, impressive literary teacher of our time; but he is a religious philosopher as well. He has expressed himself upon a larger variety of problems than any modern poet. He who would serve men's highest interests, as secular or religious teacher, will find more of suggestion, more of illustration, more of stimulus, in Browning than in any modern writer."

We have made this round dozen of quotations, from some of those who by their close study of the poet are

most competent to pronounce an opinion, that the reader who is just taking up the work may have his appetite whetted, may know what to expect, and if he fails to find it all at first may be encouraged to press forward till he attains. It is clear from what has been said that Browning's pages are largely occupied with the development of souls, the analysis of men's motives and judgments, the tracing of the relations of man and nature to God as well as of man to man; that life, past, present, and to come, is his main theme—life as affected by love, art, and religion; and that force, faith, and thought are the dominating qualities in his poetry. He is the most virile of poets and the healthiest. His robust health is seen on every page. He is thoroughly manly and masculine, yet his titanic strength has in it a wealth of tenderness, and it has been especially noted by women readers that he gives woman her true position, putting both sexes on the broad level of equality, judging each individual according to merit. There is no shade of patronage in his tone about women. He is free from sentimentality and all morbidness. Asceticism for its own sake he severely blames, and accounts self-sacrifice for the sake of self-sacrifice as most dangerous. He never considers that because a path is attractive it must be wrong, and he holds that we have no right to save our own soul at the expense of another. His warnings against the impatience and hurry of the age are very strong. To all the company of shams he calls: "Stand and deliver! How far is your work good? What is its object and its aim? Never mind that it fails; that it be your best is your sole concern." His watchwords seem to be: "Trust God, nor be afraid;" "Life is all, death is naught." Or, as another has expressed it, "The substance of what he preached was the poetical complement of Carlyle's prose, proceeding from much the same grounds, by the same steps: believe in God and act like a man." The religion of Browning is as simple and natural and

robust as his physical health. There is no cant in any of his utterances, no change of tone when he speaks of spiritual things. Partly from this natural voice in which the word is uttered, and partly from the full knowledge of the world with which he spoke, the name of God has a power on his lips that it by no means always has on those of others.

He firmly held to the unity and continuity of life, also to its relativity. He would judge it not by hard and fast rules so much as by the consideration of circumstances, seeking for and finding the faint spark of soul even in those so low and deformed that development appears hardly to have started. Thus is born a tolerance and catholicity all-comprehensive, and a charity so large as well-nigh to have for its motto, "Who understands all forgives all." He depicts, it has been acutely observed, the history of *a* soul, being a realist; whereas, had he been an idealist, like Tennyson, it would have been a history of *the* soul with which he would have been busied. Mr. J. Marshall Walker, who calls him "the apostle of hope," says: "His two verities are God and the soul; his key truth concerning the former, that God is love; concerning the latter, that man is endlessly progressive. To him there are no such things as accidents, and no such things as failures." With similar incisiveness Mr. John T. Nettleship observes: "No one can fail to be struck by his overwhelming sense of the actual existence of a personal God who rules men's souls, not by moral laws applicable to right and wrong in this life, but by rewards and punishments dealt to such souls according as they shall develop themselves through all their successive stages of existence: His firm-rooted belief is that a man's business on this earth is to learn the actual extent of his own soul's powers, and having learned them to develop them straight forward; not necessarily in accordance with human or social laws prevailing in this life, but absolutely, for the soul's perfectibility hereafter."

Browning's optimism is very frequently referred to, and rightly; for it is, perhaps, his most distinctive quality as a public teacher. It is not an optimism that blinks the facts of life. He fully recognizes the many serious evils and sorrows that abound. He is not an easy-going optimist. He has dug deep for his rock, and found it in the truth that God is love. They that have firm faith in that cannot doubt, cannot be despondent, cannot be craven-hearted. Having fought and gained a foothold, he seeks to raise others to this grand vantage ground. He bids us use the trials and pains, disappointments and losses of life as the one real means for spiritual advancement, as factors in development which cannot be dispensed with, and which, if accepted as such, will assuredly issue in something unspeakably higher and better than an unruffled life of ease and calm could possibly produce. Thus all life is good in its way, and no experience is wasted. Infinite power, he believes, will finally be discerned as the instrument and expression of infinite love. Hence he teaches that each soul should grow to its utmost in power and in love, and in the face of many mysteries, both in experience and thought, should repose with entire trust on the doctrine that God is ordering life beneficently, and should await with patience, even in the ruin of one's own or others' lives, for the disclosure which shall reconcile to our eyes and hearts the things that now most disturb our faith. Browning believes that the circumstances of life are as much adapted to the guidance of each separate soul as if it were the single object of creative care, and that therefore while the individual *knows* nothing of the divine scheme he *is* everything in it. This certainly seems to be in accord with the New Testament, and is surely full of power to comfort and uplift. Some one has well said: "The proper title to his works would be, 'The burden of Robert Browning to the nineteenth century.' No poet gives so decided an assurance of having a burden to

deliver." "Poetry is with him no jingle of words, but rather a divine trigonometry, a process of celestial triangulation, a taking observations of celestial places and spheres, an attempt to estimate our world and its place, its life, amid the boundless, immeasurable sweeps of space and time." Browning says with immense emphasis, to use the words of De Quincey: "Wheel into a new center your spiritual system; geocentric has that system been up to this hour, that is, having earth and the earthly for its starting point; henceforward make it heliocentric, that is, with the sun or the heavenly bodies for its principle of motion."

It will be evident, we think, from what has now been said, that if Browning cannot hold the palm as an artist, yielding to Tennyson in this, yet he has his own peculiar preeminence in greatness of mind and bent toward religion. He himself enters into all his work like a sweet fragrance which clings to some delicate fabric, and which, while occasionally subdued, is never lost. He is not so much of an artist, not so great a poet, perhaps it may be said, as if he had been less of a philosopher, and his philosophy would in some respects undoubtedly have been plainer if presented in simple prose. His poetic genius has combined with his thinking power to make him a most original and profound interpreter of the great problems of human existence, and it is for this men prize him; but love for him, as a rule, has to be acquired, and becomes a sign of spiritual brotherhood. If anyone does not like him it only proves that for some reason, good or bad, to that man he has nothing to say. He is not a book, but a literature, a sort of Socrates, Diogenes, and David combined, a man who possessed the soul-depicting faculty, a minute power of reading other men's hearts, to an extent unsurpassed by any other poet, ancient or modern—a potent and subtle quality difficult to describe but easy to feel. "He has made life richer and ampler," said Colonel T. W. Higginson

in his tribute at the memorial services in Boston, "youth more beautiful, age more venerable and hopeful."<sup>1</sup>) Very many, a constantly increasing number, stand ready to adopt heartily the words of Walter Savage Landor:

"Browning! Since Chaucer was alive and hale  
No man hath walked along our roads with step  
So active, so inquiring eye, or tongue  
So varied in discourse. But warmer climes  
Give brighter plumage, stronger wing: the breeze  
Of Alpine heights thou playest with, borne on  
Beyond Sorrento and Amalfi, where  
The Siren waits thee, singing song for song."

## THE BENEFITS OF BROWNING STUDY.

HAVING made the reader acquainted with the personality of the poet, sufficiently at least to stimulate interest in his productions, and having supplied an estimate both of his excellencies and defects as a writer, it remains for us, before introducing the poems, to still further whet the appetite of the student by mentioning some of the benefits which will certainly accrue to him from such study. We specify the six that we account chief, but others might be easily drawn out.

I. The study of Browning will enlarge one's vocabulary. It is mentioned by Mrs. Sutherland Orr, in her *Life and Letters* of the poet, that as a primary qualification for his literary pursuits he read and digested in early life the whole of Johnson's Dictionary. One can readily believe it. "People accuse me of not taking pains," he said in later years; "I take nothing but pains." He devoted the most conscientious labor to the perfection of his work, and the knowledge he exhibits of the capacities of the English language is certainly marvelous. No one can read him understandingly without pretty frequent consultation of large lexicons. And it is not so much the unusual number of rare words that deserves emphasis as it is their subtle quality and the happy selection of strong, pictorial expressions which flash the thought and gleam with light. Browning was not satisfied with common terms. He picked out those choice, condensed vocables which hold whole sentences in solution, and they live in the memory because they are windows through which a landscape laughs or stilettos that strike a victim dead. Specimens? Here is a handful:

"Stung by the splendor of a sudden thought." "Pedestalled in triumph." "The motley, merchandising multitude." "The puissance of

the tongue." "Mute in the midst, the whole man one amaze." "Lamb-pure, lion-brave." "Cold glories served up with stale fame for sauce." "Some wonder of a woman's heart." "The straight backbone thought of a crooked speech." "Worn threadbare of soul by forty-six years of rubbing on hard life." "Not by the grandeur, God, but by the comfort, Christ." "A good girl, with the velvet in her voice." "Silenced the squabble between soul and sense." "The stone strength of white despair." "Dry to the marrow, 'mid much merchandise." "The weak and ever-wavering will." "God must be glad one loves his world so much." "Smooth-mannered, soft-speeched, sleek-cheeked visitor." "The thin clear gray hold of his eyes on her." "Daughters lured as larks by looking-glass." "O mouse-birth of that mountain-like revenge." "God's All-mercy mates All-potency." "She all silverly baaed gratitude while meditating mischief." "Speech half asleep, or song half awake." "So good a pedagogue is penury." "A lustrous and pellucid soul." "God sends the accident express." "The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer." "Be Kant crowned king o' the castle in the air." "Cleverness uncurbed by conscience." "Dumb menace in that mouth, malice in that unstridulosity." "Your mealy-mouthed mild milksops." "Shatters silence." "Daughters sly and tall and curling and compliant." "The coruscating marvel—Fame!" "Lightning-swift, thunder-strong." "Inched out, his uttermost." "God's lily-limbed and blushrose-bosomed Eve." "He sat absorbed in one profound ex cogitation." "The itch that knows no cure but daily paper-friction." "With deferential duck, slow swing of head." "Dim and done-with boyishness." "Slow despondency's eternal sigh." "A cavern's ostentatious vacancy." "A foe pollent in potency." "O, live and love worthily, bear and be bold." "The heart was wise according to its lights and limits." "How soon a smile of God can change the world." "Touch him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke." "A gold-red stag that stood and stared, gigantic and magnific." "Lean, pale, proud insignificance." "Wormy ways, the indirect, unapproved of God." "Unimaginative ignorance." "Cloudlets scudding under the bare blue." "All one couch of crassitude." "Hell, eruptive and fuliginous." "Diamond, slipping flame from fifty slants." "Pearl, that great round glory of pellucid stuff a fish secreted round a grain of grit."

One can scarcely read these, and hundreds of similar sentences, without having his verbal taste decidedly refined. He will be more apt in his choice of words, satisfied with nothing but the best. He may not think it worth while to read through the *Century* or the *Standard Dic-*

tionary, but he will be on the watch, wherever he does read, for terms crowded with significance. He will become an artist in language, skillful in applying literary color, a discerner of the beautiful and the terrible in speech. To compass an acquirement of this sort one may well spend laborious days and meditative nights. For it is the power of making one's thought pass with swiftness into the minds of other men, and hook itself to their souls.

II. It will beautify one's style. Browning, as we have already intimated, is no mere poet of prettiness, taken up with dainty devices and idle conceits. He is too great for that. He is not a maker of rhymes, or a turner of phrases, but an interpreter of life. He distinctly rebelled at the too prevalent demand for jingle to which many poets have unbecomingly succumbed, and he absolutely refused in any case to subordinate sense to sound. Thought with him was the main thing, and if matter or form had to be sacrificed he always let the latter go. The popular clamor that everything must be smooth and sweet and easy was an offense to him, and he voiced his protest against this by a frequent ruggedness and harshness of verse that has been something of a stumbling-block to many readers. He says himself, in a private letter, in 1868:

I can have little doubt that my writing has been in the main too hard for many that I should have been pleased to communicate with. But I never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed. On the other hand, I never pretended to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar or a game of dominoes to an idle man. So, perhaps, on the whole, I get my deserts, and something over; not a crowd, but a few I value more.

But while in the general tenor of his poetry he is a seer rather than a singer, differing in this from the common run of rhymers, a painter dealing with the eye rather than a musician dealing with the ear, he knows well how to put rich melody into his lines when there is real call for it in the meaning which he would convey. His subjects are

rarely such as readily admit of musical treatment. They more generally demand the grand, deep roll of the ocean instead of the merry tinkle of purling, babbling brooks. He does not sing of happy days in leafy June so often as of harsh December's pelting storms. Nevertheless, the "concord of sweet sounds" is very manifest and very attractive in many of the poems. So that both he who strives to grasp greater strength of expression and he who aims at harmonious numbers, a liquid diction, and a fluid movement will find abundant help in the study of Browning. What, for example, can be more mellifluous than the opening verses of *Fifine at the Fair*:

O trip and skip, Elvire ! Link arm in arm with me !  
Like husband and like wife, together let us see  
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,  
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.

They pace and promenade ; they presently will dance :  
What good were else i' the drum and fife ? O pleasant land of France !

Note also the poem beginning, "Over the sea our galley's went." Indeed, from the immense mass of Browning's productions a good-sized volume could easily be compiled that should supremely illustrate beauty; and he who wishes to read mainly for the cultivation of this element can easily confine himself for a season to poems of this sort, for they are plentiful. And whoever thus trains his ear to appreciate the proper balance of a sentence and the true martial movement in words has distinctly added to his power, whether for writing or speaking. If the arrow of truth be feathered aright it will go the straighter to its mark.

III. It will stimulate one's imagination and kindle one's emotion. For these are chief constituents in all true poetry. It makes a demand upon the imagination in its perusal, because only by the vivid and prolonged exercise of that power can it be produced, and, similarly, the reading it arouses feeling, for only when facts are intensified and sublimated by feeling do they grow poetic. Rhyme

and rhythm do not constitute poetry. The vehicle of expression is always of less importance than the thought expressed. If emotion and imagination are lacking, whatever the form of language, it cannot be called other than prose. The question with reference to any piece of writing which claims to be a poem is, What inspiring quality has it—does it stir to great deeds, does it reveal the inmost side of truth, has it glow and thrill, or comfort and sustaining power? If there be a creative spirit in it; if deepest feeling be idealized and monumentalized; if it be suffused with the white heat of passion or so surcharged with sentiment that it transports us into the higher regions of human experience; if it be, as Matthew Arnold says it should, "thought and art in one;" if it contain, as Wordsworth declares essential, "the breath and fever spirit of all knowledge," then we may call it poetry, even though the technical rules for such construction are audaciously or magnificently ignored.

A poet is thinker, feeler, artist, combined. He is a man who "sees the infinite in things;" who, by his imagination, gets nearer to the heart of life and penetrates closer to the core of truth than the cool reasoner or the scientific investigator. He is a man of intuition, insight, and genius; an inspired man in the best sense, magnetic to God, and a prime medium for divine communications to the world. A great poet must have a great intellect, capable of comprehending the deepest problems of man's relation to the universe; he must also have a very exceptional susceptibility to impressions from all conceivable quarters, together with such a command of musical speech that he can easily turn these impressions into durable, beautiful, and visible, if not vendible, verse. Such, in the most emphatic sense, was Robert Browning.

Is it not evident, then, that to con his conceptions, to think his thoughts after him, to catch the swing and sweep of his majestic pinions, must tend to develop those germs

of poetry lying latent in nearly all of us, and give exercise to those highest faculties which are in no little danger of becoming dwarfed or shriveled by lack of use in the hurrying pressure of life's dull daily drudgery? Browning's imagination, it may perhaps fairly be said, did not soar so loftily and steadily as that of some other poets has soared, because he exerted it mainly upon real things, upon the thoughts and feelings of human beings. He was not visionary, but intensely practical. All the more, on this account, it is thoroughly wholesome to follow the leadings of his mind, and through the glowing golden gates of imagination and emotion enlarge one's acquaintance with the world without and with the world within.

IV. It will increase one's knowledge of human nature. As just intimated, Browning dwells for the most part upon the internal rather than the external. His main work is the analysis and portraiture of personal character, of human life, past, present, and to come—an analysis of the most subtle kind, reaching to the inmost impulses of the heart, and a portraiture that brings before us the most vivid as well as the most picturesque images. He is the "poet of psychology," from whom human nature has no secrets. It has been well said that the subtitle of most of his poems might be, "Incidents in the development of a soul." It was clearly his chief calling to paint the souls of men; to pursue, through all the winding mazes of the mind, the elusive motive; to catch the shifting fancies and celestial or infernal lights. The soul seemed to him the one thing best worthy of study, the one thing of intensest interest. He was fascinated by it, and by the spectacle of man seeking his destiny amid the countless combinations of circumstances and conditions that confront or surround him. He has been often likened to Shakespeare because of this absorption in human nature, and because of his power to throw himself into the most diverse individualities and to think and feel as they would in the situation depicted.

His favorite method, followed through nearly all the longer poems and many of the shorter ones, is monodramatic; not truly dramatic, where a number of characters appear upon the stage, each speaking in his own person and directly affecting the welfare of the rest; nor yet after the nature of soliloquy, where a single individual speaks to himself alone; but something between. In the monodrama, while one person does the speaking he speaks in the presence of others, addressing them, so that their thoughts and words as well as his own come freely out, in one way or another, during the course of the narration. The supposed second person serves to call forth the utterances of the speaker and to stimulate the imagination of the reader, thus giving the artist greater room to work out his conceptions of character. The story is told, in every case, not for the mere incident, but for the unfolding of passion and the play of feeling. And the poet's preeminent genius appears in the wide range of characters through which, with consummate skill, he speaks. How broad must be the sympathies, how keen the observation, how deep the insight into human nature of one who can so completely identify himself with hundreds of separate and dissimilar persons, entering into their most private thoughts and ardently defending their doings from their own point of view ! In his masterpiece, *The Ring and the Book*—which marks the high tide of his poetic insight, the zenith of his literary power, contains twenty-one thousand one hundred and sixteen lines (about as many words as are in the New Testament), and is called by the *Athenæum* not only “the supremest poetic achievement of the time,” but also “the most profound and precious spiritual treasure that England had produced since the days of Shakespeare”—he tells the story of a Roman murder as one half of Rome sees it, then as the other half regards it; then he gives the medium view as to why the things happened thus; then sets forth the villainous murderer’s side; then the side of the

hero of the plot; next the heroine states her version of the facts; then the attorney for the defense takes up the tale, followed by the attorney for the prosecution, after which the pope as final judge reviews the case; and, lastly, the criminal once more pleads his cause. It is safe to say that no other single poem, perhaps no other equal number of verses, shows such close familiarity with the workings of the mind and heart of man, or contains such plentiful material for enlarging one's acquaintance with the human soul.

V. It will tighten one's moral grip. Among the trials most keenly felt by the best classes in the community few are more dangerous or more prevalent than the temptation to lower their standard for the sake of heightening their popularity. The world constantly demands conformity to itself as the price of its favor; and while the young man starts out with a high ideal to which he proposes to lift others, confident that he will never show a white feather in the fight, it is found after a while that in most cases he weakens before the solid masses of the foe, and consents to compromise, that he may gain peace, or position, or profit—a sad history, continually recurring. Browning was confronted by this danger. It stood squarely across his path. Did he yield? Not for an instant. There are few facts in the history of literature more remarkable and significant than the treatment meted out for half a century to this peerless poet. The British public, he pathetically remarks, liked him not. All his earlier poems, published at a relative's expense, proved a financial loss, and many years subsequently, when he had really found a publisher, the report from that firm for a certain six months was that not a single copy of his works had been sold. His friends, especially his devoted and gifted wife, were exceedingly indignant over this neglect. But it never seems to have troubled the poet himself. He made no complaints. Still less did it induce him to modify

in the slightest degree that message and method which he profoundly felt God had intrusted to him for his age. Not till the publication of *The Ring and the Book*, in 1868, was there any adequate recognition of his genius, even by critical minds, and his wide acceptance was still far in the future. But as to this he was little concerned. Writing to a friend in the last decade of his life, when larger praise had come, he says: "As I never felt inconvenienced by hard words you will not expect me to wax bumptious because of undue compliment." On another occasion he wrote: "As I began so I shall end, taking my own course, pleasing myself, or aiming to do so, and thereby I hope pleasing God. As I never did otherwise I never had any fear as to what I did going ultimately to the bad." He never would consent to conciliate public opinion at the expense of what he felt to be the true principles of his art. He kept calmly on his way, and patiently waited for the justification which he was sure would eventually come. He was willing to bide his time. He maintained his right to be himself, not a pale copy of somebody else. He said straight out what was in his mind, in the way in which it presented itself and after the style natural to him, without inquiring closely whether the people would sustain him or not. His independence is refreshing. And he conquered—as every such man must conquer, give him scope enough. He cared nothing for success in the ordinary, worldly meaning of that term. To have a right aim, a lofty ideal, and to be unswervingly true to it under all circumstances seemed to him the only real success. No failure is possible to such. He counted that the only failure consisted in doing less than one's best. He held it "better to have failed in the high aim than vulgarly in the low aim succeed." "It is not what a man does which exalts him, but what a man would do," he said. And again, "What I am, what I am not, in the eye of the world, is what I never cared for much." He moved steadfastly on, regarding very

little the praise or blame of his fellows, untouched by the world's voices, in a higher, diviner atmosphere. He has much to say about "the chivalry that dares the right and disregards alike the yea and nay o' the world."

Aspire, break bounds ! I say,  
Endeavor to be good, and better still,  
And best ! Success is naught, endeavor's all.

No duty patent in the world  
Like daring try be good and true myself,  
Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of Show  
And Prince o' the Power of the Air.

And still more beautifully comes out this thrilling thought, still more brilliantly flames this fervent faith, in his very last poem, the Epilogue to *Asolando*, written just before his death-illness. After reading it from a proof to his daughter-in-law and sister he said, "It almost looks like bragging to say this, and as if I ought to cancel it; but it's the simple truth, and, as it's true, it shall stand." Here are the words:

What had I on earth to do  
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly ?  
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel,  
Being—who ?  
One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake.

We see not how anyone can enter into the spirit of such lines as these here quoted, together with many others of similar import which he wrote, without having his grip perceptibly tightened on the fundamental moral axiom that duty is to be done, and truth spoken without faltering, whether men will hear or forbear. No preacher, or public man of any sort, can lower his banner, or strike his flag to fear, who stamps these words upon his brain and drinks from the cup of him who first set them forth. Appreciated or not, recompensed or ridiculed, promoted or relegated to the rear, the genuine hero will stand to his guns and

fire his last shot with as straight an aim as the first, cheerfully leaving his vindication to God. One might bend long over Browning and feel well repaid if something of this power passed into him.

VI. It will strengthen one's religious faith. Browning's whole being is wrapped round the central thought of God. The most vital thing in his conception of man is his relation to duty. The visible universe is but a veil scarce covering the ever-present, all-important unseen world. Says one, "He never loses consciousness of the supreme eternal will, the intelligent first cause underlying all manner of systems of causation." Another said, "Take away the religious tissue from Browning's tapestry with its vast variety of figures, and almost everyone would be a *caput mortuum*." "Forward to the infinite," is his cry; in this tabernacle life no rest can be found. He asserts the eternal reality of the soul as the most vital truth that can come within the ken of man. There can be no doubt that he is the most thoroughly Christian of all our great poets. Mr. James Thomson, an avowed atheist, belonging to the Browning Club, wrote:

I must not fail to note, as one of the most remarkable characteristics of his genius, his profound, passionate, loving, and triumphant faith in Christ, and in the immortality and ultimate redemption of every human soul in and through Christ. Thoroughly familiar with all modern doubts and disbeliefs, he trampled them all under foot, clinging to the cross; and this with the full cooperation of his peerless reason, not in spite of it and by its absolute surrender and suppression.

Dr. Edward Berdoe, as he himself narrates in the beginning of his recently published volume, *Browning and the Christian Faith*, was converted from Agnosticism to Christianity by the study of Browning. He also relates that a student at one of the theological schools once consulted a divinity lecturer as to the best books on modern theology which he could present to a skeptical friend. And the prompt, decisive answer came, "Give him a set of

Browning." Such a one would find blazing on almost every page of the voluminous works, in one form or another, the declaration, "I believe in God." And he would see that this life, according to the poet, could in no way be explained, except with close reference to the life beyond. The unity and continuity of life, together with its magnificent meaning as a place and instrument of discipline, everywhere shines forth.

His faith in the Christian religion never seems to have weakened or wavered. Writing to a friend, he remarks: "I know all that may be said against it on the ground of history, of reason, of even moral sense. But I am none the less convinced that the life and death of Christ, as Christians apprehend them, supply something which humanity requires, and that it is true for them." And again he said: "The evidence of divine power is everywhere about us; not so the evidence of divine love. That love could only reveal itself to the human heart by some supreme act of human tenderness and devotion: the fact or fancy of Christ's cross or passion could alone supply such a revelation." It was certainly to him a fact. It has been well said, "Christian ministers have not begun to realize what a valuable ally they have in Browning." To go from many of the popular writers of the day to him is to go from those who blindly grope for the light to one whose soul has seen bright visions, and in whose bosom is peace. He never hesitated to declare or clearly imply that God alone is responsible for all the trials and sufferings of our mortal existence, and that no one of them could be dispensed with in view of the end for which we were created. He will have it that no experience is wasted, that the perfection of character is the one result that never need fail; whether our work is to rule a kingdom, or sweep a crossing, or lie on a sick bed, character is ever being upbuilt. Hence life is well worth living, come what may. Failure here is a pledge of success there. Browning seems to

bend all his energies to casting out the demon of pessimism. It is in this, perhaps, most of all, that his influence has proved so gloriously wholesome and splendidly sane, a tonic of the healthfullest sort, full of refreshment, invigoration, and inspiration. One more persistently and invincibly optimistic in his faith, one more suffused with hopefulness and high trust, it would be very hard to find or conceive. He is perpetually saying, in substance, to the despondent and downhearted: "Courage, the battle shall yet be retrieved; dare seem to fail, for only thus, by calm endurance and loyalty to high aims, shall you reach true success and prove yourself a coworker with the Almighty; come not down from the cross till he gives the word, and you shall have the crown." Such teaching must make men stronger, more earnest, truer to their better selves, more genuinely Christian in the large, substantial, vital way which alone is of primary importance. We make room here for but three quotations embodying these thoughts. Many others will be found in the following pages.

Let one more attest,  
I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime,  
And all was for best.

This world's no blot for us, nor blank ;  
It means intensely, and means good.

But where will God be absent ? In his face  
Is light, but in his shadow healing too.

We might add to these six benefits the advantage of becoming familiar with the charming character of the poet, and thus enlarging our list of friends by one every way worthy to stand beside the best. We might also write at some length of the well-matured ideas about art in its various forms which are scattered through the volumes, and the large variety of miscellaneous, but not unimportant, information which will be acquired in the course of an endeavor to thoroughly understand the wide-branch-

ing work of this marvelously comprehensive author. But an exhaustive catalogue of the good results of Browning study it would be profitless to attempt. Indeed, it is probable that no two individuals would draw up precisely the same list. He touches different people on different sides, as is the case with all the great; and men find in him what they seek, or what particularly meets their personal needs.

He will always remain, perhaps, the poet of the few; one for whom a love must be acquired by some study. He is too unconventional, makes too great a demand upon thought, mixes too little water with his ink to suit the many. He is not shallow enough to be popular. But one can scarcely understand the age in which we live who does not understand Browning. He is the best interpreter of our time, uttering our needs and our aspirations, our fears and our faith. He is a great prophet, who spoke in numbers because he felt that poetry is the appointed vehicle for all lasting truths and inspiring thoughts. He is a philosopher, profoundly interpreting the main problems of human existence. As a poet he stands apart, a unique figure, with no forerunner, no successor, an original force in literature. No one can read him diligently without great benefit to both intellect and heart. The profound personal indebtedness to him expressed by his admirers, and their intense devotedness, are most significant. The keynote of his teaching is love. Love and faith are the instruments of his analysis and the explanations of his wonderful insight into character. Love, art, and religion are his principal themes. How manly, robust, energetic, and wide-awake his thought! They who sit at his feet are helped by him to understand the meaning of life, are enriched in their sympathies and broadened in their views. He always sees a soul of good in things evil; and shows how God's purposes are being wrought out by means the most unpromising. When he looks at criminals,

of whom there are many in his pages, he looks deeper than their crimes. He finds evidence of the divine presence in all the various entanglements of human doings, and in individual souls of every sort. At the heart of much that passes for wickedness he perceives a germ of righteousness, and notes the pulsations of the life of the Highest in all history. "Hardly any conception is more prominent in Browning's writings," says Professor Henry Jones, of St. Andrew's University, "than this of endless progress toward an infinite ideal; he recognizes that growing knowledge is an essential condition of growing goodness." In other words, he holds that perfect love would be perfect knowledge, and perfect knowledge perfect love, no separation being possible.

Says Dr. Alexander McLaren, the great Manchester preacher, who is an enthusiastic student of Browning: "In wealth of genius, in loftiness of reach, in intensity of creative imagination I know of nothing to compare with the highest work of Browning. The crowd of men and women, alive and tingling to their finger-tips, whom he has made, are only paralleled by Shakespeare's. There is nobody else that can stand beside him." And Owen Meredith has voiced the feelings of all who are best fitted to pronounce judgment, when he writes of him as one

Than whom a mightier master never  
Touched the deep chords of hidden things ;  
Nor error did from truth dissever  
With keener glance, nor make endeavor  
To rise on bolder wings,  
In those high regions of the soul  
Where thought itself grows dim with awe.

## BRIEF FELICITIES AND FANCIES.

So that I might unlock the sleepless brood  
Of fancies from my soul, their lurking-place.

As one entering bright halls where all  
Will rise and shout for him.

I look  
With hope to age at last, which, quenching much,  
May let me concentrate what sparks it spares.

And her neck looks like marble misted o'er  
With love-breath.

Clusters of far fair isles which ocean kept  
For his own joy, and his waves broke on them  
Without a choice.

Where nature lies all wild amid her lakes  
And snow-swathed mountains and vast pines begirt  
With ropes of snow.

Two points in the adventure of the diver,  
One—when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,  
One—when, a prince, he rises with his pearl.

God is the perfect poet,  
Who in his person acts his own creations.

Michal's face  
Still wears that quiet and peculiar light  
Like the dim circlet floating round a pearl.

Those were happy days.  
Respect all such as sing when all alone.

Just as some stream foams long among the rocks  
But after glideth glassy to the sea.

Not a face  
But wrath made livid, for among them were  
Death's stanch purveyors, such as have in care

\* The figures give the number of the page in the Cambridge edition of *Browning's Complete Poetical Works*, and are appended that the reader may refer to the context of the quotation if so disposed.

To feast him. Fear had long since taken root  
 In every breast, and now these crushed its fruit,  
 The ripe hate, like a wine : to note the way  
 It worked while each grew drunk! Men grave and gray  
 Stood, with shut eyelids, rocking to and fro,  
 Letting the silent luxury trickle slow  
 About the hollows where a heart should be;  
 But the young gulped with a delirious glee  
 Some foretaste of their first debauch in blood  
 At the fierce news.

75.

Just-tinged marble like Eve's lilyed flesh  
 Beneath her maker's finger when the fresh  
 First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.

78.

Would you have your songs endure ?  
 Build on the human heart.

90.

Beneath  
 Soon sates the looker—look above, and Death  
 Tempts ere a tithe of Life be tasted. Live  
 First, and die soon enough, Sordello.

122.

What matters happiness ?  
 Duty ! There's man's one moment : this is yours.

162.

To bring the invisible full into play !  
 Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters ?

177.

O woman-country,\* wooed not wed,  
 Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,  
 Laid to their hearts instead.

185.

How sharp the silver spear-heads charge  
 When Alp meets heaven in snow !

185.

An age so blest that, by its side,  
 Youth seems the waste instead.

186.

With men that every virtue decks,  
 And women models of their sex.

191.

O world, as God has made it ! All is beauty :  
 And knowing this is love, and love is duty.

194.

\* Italy, where the poet spent so many happy years. Two lines from his poem, *De Gustibus*,

"Open my heart and you will see  
 Graved inside of it, 'Italy,'"

are inscribed on the memorial tablet which marks the palace in Venice where he breathed his last.

And then as, 'mid the dark, a gleam  
 Of yet another morning breaks,  
 And like the hand which ends a dream,  
 Death, with the might of his sunbeam,  
 Touches the flesh and the soul awakes.

277.

Whose slight free loose and incapacious soul  
 Gave his tongue scope to say whate'er he would.

291.

I trust in God—the right shall be the right  
 And other than the wrong, while he endures.

291.

With that thin flitting instantaneous steel  
 'Gainst the blind bull-front of a brute-force world.

300.

His very serviceable suit of black  
 Was courtly once and conscientious still.

336.

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
 Or what's a heaven for?

346.

My business is not to remake myself,  
 But make the absolute best of what God made.

352.

The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life :  
 Try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate!

353.

Proves she like some portent of an iceberg  
 Swimming full upon the ship it founders,  
 Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals.

363.

Hair such a wonder of flax and floss,  
 Freshness and fragrance—floods of it too.

377.

Go get you manned by Manning and new-manned  
 By Newman, and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot  
 By Wiseman, and we'll see or else we won't.

\*418.

In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed  
 The beauty and the fearfulness of night.

419.

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\* All extracts between pages 414 and 601 are from Browning's great masterpiece, *The Ring and the Book*. Very many of the single lines and phrases quoted on a previous page, in the essay on "The Benefits of Browning Study," are also from this same poem. All extracts between pages 602 and 628 are from *Balaustion's Adventure*; those between pages 736 and 773 are from *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*; those between 773 and 802 are from the *Inn Album*; those between 849 and 859 are from *La Saisiaz*. The rest are mainly from the shorter poems.

I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,  
Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell.

419.

A beak-nosed, bushy-bearded, black-haired lord,  
Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust.

421.

Here are the voices presently shall sound  
In due succession. First, the world's outcry  
Around the rush and ripple of any fact  
Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things ;  
The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,  
At what were figure and substance, by their splash :  
Then, by vibrations in the general mind,  
At depth of deed already out of reach.

422.

Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone  
To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls.

423.

Hideous heritage  
Gathered from the gutter to be garnered up  
And glorified in a palace.

432.

Let law shine forth and show, as God in heaven,  
Vice prostrate, virtue pedestalled at last,  
The triumph of truth !

436.

The over-burdened mind  
Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze.

439.

No sparing saints the process !—which the more  
Tends to the reconciling us, no saints,  
To sinnership, immunity and all.

442.

'Tis in a child, man and wife grow complete,  
One flesh : God says so : let him do his work !

442.

Grasp the bag  
Lest the son's service flag,—is reason and rhyme,  
Above all when the son's a son-in-law.

445.

Not so Violante : ever ahead i' the march,  
Quick at the by-road and the cut-across ;  
She went first to the best adviser, God—  
Whose finger unmistakably was felt  
In all this retribution of the past.

445.

The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart-sneak  
Who, not content with cutting purse, crops ear.

446.

Even that poor old bit of battered brass  
Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,  
Common utensil of the lazarus-house—  
Confessor Celestino.

448.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Nay, more—not thrusting, like a badge to hide,  
 'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame—  
 But flirting flag-like i' the face o' the world  
 This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love  
 For the lady.

448.

As when the martin migrates : autumn claps  
 Her hands, cries "Winter's coming, will be here,  
 Off with you ere the white teeth overtake !  
 Flee !" So I fled.

451.

The priest, alive  
 And alert, calm, resolute, and formidable,  
 Not the least look of fear in that broad brow.

452.

If, with the midday blaze of truth above,  
 The unlidded eye of God awake, aware.

453.

His wife's heart swelled her bodice, joyed its fill  
 When neighbors turned heads wistfully at church,  
 Sighed at the load of lace that came to pray.

457.

Such naked truth while chambered in the brain  
 Shocks nowise : walk it forth by way of tongue,—  
 Out on the cynical unseemliness !

461.

Unluckily temptation is at hand—  
 To take revenge on a trifle overlooked,  
 A pet lamb they have left in reach outside,  
 Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,  
 Will strike the grinners grave : his wife remains.

462.

A husband, poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,  
 Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed.

462.

Virtue in a chafe should change her linen quick,  
 Lest pleurisy get start of providence.

469.

As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,  
 Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,  
 And rise with something of a rosy shame  
 Into immortal nakedness.

498.

Dawn broke, noon broadened, I—  
 I sat stone-still, let time run over me.

498.

It is faith,  
 The feeling that there's God, he reigns and rules  
 Out of this low world.

500.

As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,  
 Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down  
 Hillside, lies low and prostrate on the smooth  
 Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale.

507.

- His truth to teach the world : I thirst for truth,  
But shall not drink it till I reach the source. 508.
- He thought I could not properly forgive  
Unless I ceased forgetting—which is true. 514.
- I did for once see right, do right, give tongue  
The adequate protest : for a worm must turn  
If it would have its wrong observed by God. 523.
- Right, promptly done, is twice right : right delayed  
Turns wrong. 533.
- What though he hired base hinds by lucre's hope  
The only motive they could masticate. 539.
- Her babe—that flexure of soft limbs,  
That budding face imbued with dewy sleep. 541.
- For I am 'ware it is the seed of act,  
God holds appraising in his hollow palm,  
Not act grown great thence on the world below,  
Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire. 556.
- At first prompting of what I call God,  
And fools call Nature. 563.
- Ay, such championship  
Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud  
Of glove on ground that answers ringingly  
The challenge of the false knight. 564.
- Why live  
Except for love,—how love unless they know ? 565.
- A little saucy rose-bud minx can strike  
Death-damp into the breast of doughty king  
Thongh 't were French Louis,—soul I understand,—  
Saying, by gesture of repugnance, just  
“ Sire, you are regal, puissant, and so forth,  
But—young you have been, are not, nor will be ! ” 581.
- Why fell not things out so nor otherwise ?  
Ask that particular devil whose task it is  
To trip the all-but-at perfection,—slur  
The line o' the painter just where paint leaves off  
And life begins,—put ice into the ode  
O' the poet while he cries “ Next stanza—fire ! ”  
Inscribe all human effort with one word,  
Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete !  
Being incomplete, my act escaped success. 586.

- For unsuccess, explain it how you will,  
Disqualifies you, makes you doubt yourself,  
—Much more, is found decisive by your friends. 589.
- It is the will runs the renewing nerve  
Through flaccid flesh that faints before the time. 589.
- You never know what life means till you die :  
Even throughout life, 'tis death that makes life live,  
Gives it whatever the significance. 593.
- Ay,—for here comes Death  
Close on us of a sudden ! who, pale priest  
Of the mute people, means to bear his prey  
To the house of Hades. 606.
- And, in the fire-flash of the appalling sword,  
The uprush and the outburst, the onslaught  
Of Death's portentous passage through the door,  
Apollon stood a pitying moment-space. 607.
- He wept  
Plenteously, waxed importunate in prayer,  
Folly's old fashion when its seed bears fruit. 608.
- She saw things plain as Gods do : by one stroke  
O' the sword that rends the life-long veil away. 609.
- Stupid ? Nay, but sagacious in a sort ;  
Learned, life-long i' the first outside of things,  
Though bat for blindness to what lies beneath  
And needs a nail-scratch ere 'tis laid you bare. 618.
- So, he stood petting up his puny hate,  
Parent-wise, proud of the ill-favored babe. 619.
- There smiled the mighty presence, all one smile  
And no touch more of the world-weary God. 619.
- Well, if a good laugh and a jovial word  
Could bridle age which blew bad humors forth,  
That were a kind of help, too ! 619.
- Since to your solemn, brow-contracting sort,  
• • • • •  
Life is not truly life but misery. 619.
- So poor Admetos piled up argument  
Vainly against the purpose all too plain  
In that great brow acquainted with command. 623.

Fain would Admetos keep that splendid smile  
 Ever to light him. "Stay with us, thou heart !  
 Remain our house-friend !"

625.

Right they named you—some rich name,  
 Vowel buds thorned about with consonants,  
 Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched  
 By the Isle's unguent.

634.

A crowd of hypocrites  
 Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and greed.

656.

Sweep of the swathe when only the winds walk  
 And waft my words above the grassy sea  
 Under the blinding blue that basks o'er Rome.

689.

Hans must not burn Kant's house above his head  
 Because he cannot understand Kant's book :  
 And still less must Hans' pastor burn Kant's self  
 Because Kant understands some books too well.

692.

How the pennon from its dome,  
 Frenetic to be free, makes one red stretch for home.

702.

The whole of the gay front sun-satisfied,  
 One laugh of color and embellishment.

745.

The large and lumbbersome and . . . dignified  
 And gentry-fashioned old-style haunts of sleep.

753.

Spiritual effort to compound for fault  
 By payment of devotion—thank the phrase.

764.

She was lady there for life :  
 And, after life—I hope, a white success  
 Of some sort, wheresoever life resume  
 School interrupted by vacation—death.

773.

That bard's a Browning ; he neglects the form :  
 But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense !

773.

O, such a wonder of a woman ! Grand  
 As a Greek statue !

779.

You eat that root of bitterness called Man  
 —Raw : I prefer it cooked, with social sauce.

789.

My life's remainder, which, say what fools will,  
 Is or should be the best of life,—its fruit,  
 All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.

791.

Renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham,  
 This poodle clipt to pattern, lion-like !

794.

## MORAL AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS.

My God, my God, let me for once look on thee  
 As though naught else existed, we alone !  
 And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark  
 Expands till I can say,—Even from myself  
 I need thee and I feel thee and I love thee.  
 I do not plead my rapture in thy works  
 For love of thee, nor that I feel as one  
 Who cannot die : but there is that in me  
 Which turns to thee, which loves or which should love.

9 *Pauline.*\*

I go to prove my soul !  
 I see my way as birds their trackless way.  
 I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,  
 I ask not: but unless God send his hail  
 Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,  
 In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:  
 He guides me and the bird. In his good time !

17 *Paracelsus.*†

Such is my task. I go to gather this  
 The sacred knowledge, here and there dispersed  
 About the world, long lost or never found.  
 And why should I be sad or lorn of hope ?  
 Why ever make man's good distinct from God's,  
 Or, finding they are one, why dare mistrust ?

19 *Ib.*

See this soul of ours !  
 How it strives weakly in the child, is loosed  
 In manhood, clogged by sickness, back compelled  
 By age and waste, set free at last by death :

\* In the biographical sketch two other quotations are given from *Pauline*. Though it received no public favor when printed it was very warmly commended by good judges, like the Rev. William J. Fox and Mr. John Stuart Mill; and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, coming upon it years afterward in the British Museum, admired it enough to copy it, and, surmising from internal evidence that Browning must be its author, taxed him with it and obtained a confession. It was meant as an introduction to a much larger work. The poet considerably revised it in 1888, and apologized for it more than seems necessary.

† General Gordon, the hero of Khartoum, was wont to declare that nothing in all nonscriptural literature was so dear to him, nothing had so often inspired him in moments of gloom, as the above lines. *Para-*

Why is it, flesh entralls it or enthrones ?  
What is this flesh we have to penetrate ?

19 Ib.

God ! Thou art mind ! Unto the master-mind  
Mind should be precious. Spare my mind alone !  
All else I will endure ; if, as I stand  
Here, with my gains, thy thunder smite me down,  
I bow me ; 'tis thy will, thy righteous will ;  
I o'erpass life's restrictions, and I die ;  
And if no trace of my career remain  
Save a thin corpse at pleasure of the wind  
In these bright chambers level with the air,  
See thou to it ! But if my spirit fail,  
My once proud spirit forsake me at the last,  
Hast thou done well by me ? So do not thou !  
Crush not my mind, dear God, though I be crushed !

21 Ib.

## No mean trick

He left untried, and truly well-nigh wormed  
All traces of God's finger out of him :  
Then died, grown old. And just an hour before,  
Having lain long with blank and soulless eyes,  
He sat up suddenly, and with natural voice  
Said that in spite of thick air and closed doors  
God told him it was June ; and he knew well,  
Without such telling, harebells grew in June ;

*celsus*, from which eight extracts are here given, was written in 1835, but was very considerably revised at a later date, nearly a third of the lines being changed. (The main changes are given in Cooke's *Browning-Guide Book*, pp. 265-279.) It contains four fine lyrics. The one of them most admired, "Over the sea our galleys went," will be found on another page of this volume, also a few further selections from this same poem. Paracelsus himself was a distinguished European physician and chemist of the sixteenth century, whose history may be found in the cyclopedias. In the poem he is made the type of intellect only, without love, while Aprile, an Italian poet, is made the type of love alone. Both of them make a failure of life. Browning teaches throughout his works, from the very first to the very last, that Love and Knowledge, or Power, are rightly inseparable, both in God and man. Professor C. C. Everett says of *Paracelsus*, "I should not know where to look for a grander example of sublimity in poetry." He compares it with the Jungfrau range in Switzerland, declaring, "The poem has not merely the sublimity of the mountains, it has also beauties which may remind us of the flowers that nestle among the Alpine rocks, and on the very edge of the glaciers." Professor Dawson also calls it "one of the greatest poems in English literature."

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

And all that kings could ever give or take  
Would not be precious as those blooms to him.

26 *Ib.*

Alas, such smiles are born  
Alone of hearts like yours, or herdsmen's souls  
Of ancient time, whose eyes, calm as their flocks,  
Saw in the stars mere garnishry of heaven,  
And in the earth a stage for altars only.

27 *Ib.*

No ; it must oft fall out  
That one whose labor perfects any work  
Shall rise from it with eye so worn that he  
Of all men least can measure the extent  
Of what he has accomplished. He alone  
Who, nothing tasked, is nothing weary too,  
May clearly scan the little he effects :  
But we, the bystanders, untouched by toil,  
Estimate each aright.

28 *Ib.*

God tastes an infinite joy  
In infinite ways—one everlasting bliss,  
From whom all being emanates, all power  
Proceeds ; in whom is life for evermore,  
Yet whom existence in its lowest form  
Includes ; where dwells enjoyment there is he.

46 *Ib.*

Of a Power above you still  
Which, utterly incomprehensible,  
Is out of rivalry, which thus you can  
Love, though unloving all conceived by man—  
What need ! And of—none the minutest duct  
To that out-nature, naught that would instruct  
And so let rivalry begin to live—  
But of a Power its representative  
Who, being for authority the same,  
Communication different, should claim  
A course, the first chose but this last revealed—  
This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—  
What utter need !

125 *Sordello.\**


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\* *Sordello*, published in 1840, was reprinted in 1863 with a dedication in which occur the significant explanatory words : " My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul ; little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so." The poem is confessedly very difficult (see remarks in " How to Read Browning "), and we cannot recommend its perusal. Nevertheless Mr. W. G. Kingsland says : " *Sordello* is one of the richest poems in the language ; its poetic coloring and wealth of imagination are most superb." Mr. Gosse thinks that after it has been read three times it will become " luminous, if not entirely lucid." Another critic calls it " vast as night, but like night immensely starred." We

Yet your friends, speaking of you, used that smile,  
 That hateful smirk of boundless self-conceit  
 Which seems to take possession of the world  
 And make of God a tame confederate,  
 Purveyor to their appetites . . . you know !

136 *Pippa Passes.*

To-day's brief passion limits their range ;  
 It seethes with the morrow for us and more.  
 They are perfect—how else ? they shall never change :  
 We are faulty—why not ? we have time in store.  
 The Artificer's hand is not arrested  
 With us; we are rough-hewn, nowise polished :  
 They stand for our copy, and, once invested  
 With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

'Tis a life-long toil till our lump be leaven—  
 The better ! What's come to perfection perishes.  
 Things learned on earth, we shall practice in heaven :  
 Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.  
 Thyself shalt afford the example, Giotto !  
 Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,  
 Done at a stroke, was just (was it not ?) " O ! "  
 Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

177 *Old Pictures in Florence.*

There's a fancy some lean to and others hate—  
 That, when this life is ended, begins  
 New work for the soul in another state,  
 Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins ;  
 Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,  
 Repeat in large what they practiced in small,  
 Through life after life in unlimited series;  
 Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen  
 By the means of Evil that Good is best,  
 And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene,—  
 When our faith in the same has stood the test—  
 Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,  
 The uses of labor are surely done ;  
 Their remaineth a rest for the people of God :  
 And I have had troubles enough, for one.

177 *Ib.*

Think, when our one soul understands  
 The great Word which makes all things new,  
 When earth breaks up and heaven expands,  
 How will the change strike me and you  
 In the house not made with hands ?

186 *By the Fireside.*

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show one of the stars in the lines above, where the "utter need" of Jesus Christ, the divine-human "representative" of Almighty Power, is clearly traced.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

What hand and brain went ever paired  
What heart alike conceived and dared?  
What act proved all its thought had been?  
What will but felt the fleshly screen?

268 *The Last Ride Together.*

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,  
Venture as warily, use the same skill,  
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play!—is my principle.  
Let a man contend to the uttermost  
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

The counter our lovers staked was lost  
As surely as if it were lawful coin:  
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,  
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.  
You of the virtue (we issue join)  
How strive you? *De te, fabula!*

286 *The Statue and the Bust.*

True, I thank God I ever said "You sin,"  
When a man did sin: if I could not say it,  
I glared it at him; if I could not glare it,  
I prayed against him; then my part seemed over.  
God's may begin yet: so it will, I trust.

290 *A Soul's Tragedy.*

We are to die; but even I perceive  
'Tis not a very hard thing so to die.  
My cousin of the pale-blue tearful eyes,  
Poor Cesca, suffers more from one day's life  
With the stern husband; Tisbe's heart goes forth  
Each evening after that wild son of hers,  
To track his thoughtless footstep through the streets:  
How easy for them both to die like this!  
I am not sure that I could live as they.

293 *Ib.*

My own East!  
How nearer God we were! He glows above  
With scarce an intervention, presses close  
And palpitatingly, his soul o'er ours:  
We feel him, nor by painful reason know!  
The everlasting minute of creation  
Is felt there; now it is, as it was then;  
All changes at his instantaneous will,  
Not by the operation of a law  
Whose maker is elsewhere at other work.  
His hand is still engaged upon his world—

Man's praise can forward, it man's prayer suspend,  
 For is not God all-mighty? To recast  
 The world, erase old things and make them new,  
 What costs it Him? So, man breathes nobly there.

315 *Luria.*

A people is but the attempt of many  
 To rise to the completer life of one;  
 And those who live as models for the mass  
 Are singly of more value than they all.  
 Such man are you, and such a time is this,  
 That your sole fate concerns a nation more  
 Than much apparent welfare: that to prove  
 Your rectitude, and duly crown the same,  
 Imports us far beyond to-day's event,—  
 A battle's loss or gain: man's mass remains,—  
 Keep but God's model safe, new men will rise  
 To take its mold, and other days to prove  
 How great a good was Luria's glory.

315 *Ib.*

I'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,  
 To have just looked, when this man came to die,  
 And seen who lined the clean gay garret-sides  
 And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,  
 With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.  
 Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,  
 Through a whole campaign of the world's life and death,  
 Doing the King's work all the din day long,  
 In his old coat and up to knees in mud,  
 Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—  
 And, now the day was won, relieved at once!  
 No further show or need for that old coat,  
 You are sure, for one thing! Bless us, all the while  
 How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I!  
 A second, and the angels alter that.

337 *How it Strikes a Contemporary.*

Love, we are in God's hand.  
 How strange now looks the life he makes us lead;  
 So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!  
 I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!

346 *Andrea del Sarto.*

Say you, my fault is I address myself  
 To grosser estimators than should judge?  
 And that's no way of holding up the soul,  
 Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows  
 One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools'—  
 Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that.

Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end  
 (The thing they gave at Florence,—what's its name?)  
 While the mad houseful's plaudits near outbang  
 His orchestra of salt-box, tongs, and bones,

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths  
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

352 *Bishop Blougram's Apology.*

You call for faith :  
I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists,  
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,  
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does ?  
By life and man's free will, God gave for that !  
To mold life as we choose it, shows our choice :  
That's our one act, the previous work's his own.

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask !  
Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,  
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much  
The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.  
It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare,  
Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth :  
I say it's meant to hide him all it can,  
And that's what all the blessed evil's for.  
Its use in Time is to environ us,  
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough  
Against that sight till we can bear its stress.  
Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain  
And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart  
Less certainly would wither up at once  
Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.  
But time and earth case-harden us to live ;  
The feeblest sense is trusted most ; the child  
Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,  
Plays on and grows to be a man like us.  
With me, faith means perpetual unbelief  
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot  
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.

You'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,  
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.  
How you'd exult if I could put you back  
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,  
Geology, ethnology, what not,  
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell  
That signifies some faith's about to die),  
And set you square with Genesis again,—  
When such a traveler told you his last news,  
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat  
But did not climb there since 'twas getting dusk  
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot !  
How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,  
How act ? As other people felt and did ;  
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,  
Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate,  
Full in belief's face, like the beast you'd be !

No, when the fight begins within himself,  
 A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,  
 Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—  
 He's left, himself, i' the middle : the soul wakes  
 And grows. Prolong that battle through his life !  
 Never leave growing till the life to come !

The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,  
 My faith's still greater, then my faith's enough.

355 *Ib.*

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true ;  
 Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.  
 If you loved only what were worth your love,  
 Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you :  
 Make the low nature better by your throes !  
 Give earth yourself, go up for gain above !

375 *James Lee's Wife.*

Let the mere star-fish in his vault  
 Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,  
 Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips :  
 He, whole in body and soul, outstrips  
 Man, found with either in default.

But what's whole can increase no more,  
 Is dwarfed and dies, since here's its sphere.

380 *Dis Aliter Visum.*

There shall never be one lost good ! What was, shall live as before ;  
 The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound ;  
 What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more ;  
 On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven a perfect round.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist ;  
 Not its semblance, but itself ; no beauty, nor good, nor power  
 Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist  
 When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.  
 The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,  
 The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,  
 Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard ;  
 Enough that he heard it once : we shall hear it by and by.

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence  
 For the fullness of the days ? Have we withered or agonized ?  
 Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence ?  
 Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized ?  
 Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,  
 Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe :  
 But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear ;  
 The rest may reason and welcome : 'tis we musicians know.

383 *Abt Vogler.\**


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\* This is one of the most admired of Browning's poems, ranking with

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Religion's all or nothing ; it's no mere smile  
 O' contentment, sigh o' aspiration, sir—  
 No quality o' the finelier-tempered clay  
 Like its whiteness or its lightness ; rather, stuff  
 O' the very stuff, life of life, and self of self.  
 I tell you, men won't notice ; when they do,  
 They'll understand. I notice nothing else :  
 I'm eyes, ears, mouth of me, one gaze and gape,  
 Nothing eludes me, everything's a hint,  
 Handle and help.

407 *Mr. Sludge.*

It's wiser being good than bad ;  
 It's safer being meek than fierce :  
 It's fitter being sane than mad.  
 My own hope is, a sun will pierce  
 The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;  
 That, after Last, returns the First,  
 Though a wide compass round be fetched ;  
 That what began best, can't end worst,  
 Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

413 *Apparent Failure.*

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,  
 Or decomposes but to recompose,  
 Become my universe that feels and knows.

414 *Epilogue.*

So, Pietro craved an heir,  
 (The story always old and always new)  
 Shut his fool's-eyes fast on the visible good  
 And wealth for certain, opened them owl-wide  
 On fortune's sole piece of forgetfulness,  
 The child that should have been and would not be.

429 *The Ring and the Book.*

" If as a man, then much more as a priest  
 I hold me bound to help weak innocence :  
 If so my worldly reputation burst,  
 Being the bubble it is, why, burst it may :  
 Blame I can bear though not blameworthiness.

453 *Ib.*

" The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake,  
 All were against me,—that, I knew the first :  
 But, knowing also what my duty was,  
 I did it : I must look to men more skilled  
 In reading hearts than ever was the world."

466 *Ib.*

Why, here you have the awfulest of crimes  
 For nothing ! Hell broke loose on a butterfly !  
 A dragon born of rose-dew and the moon !

---

the very best. But the greater part of it treats of music rather than religion. Hence it seems sufficient for our purpose to cull the above, which contains the chief lesson, and is the core of the whole.

Yet here is the monster! Why, he's a mere man—  
Born, bred and brought up in the usual way,  
His mother loves him, still his brothers stick  
To the good fellow of the boyish games.

470 *Ib.*

To have to do with nothing but the true,  
The good, the eternal—and these, not alone  
In the main current of the general life,  
But small experiences of every day,  
Concerns of the particular hearth and home :  
To learn not only by a comet's rush  
But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God,—  
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!

508 *Ib.*

She meant well : has it been so ill i' the main ?  
That is but fair to ask : one cannot judge  
Of what has been the ill or well of life,  
The day that one is dying,—sorrows change  
Into not altogether sorrow-like ;  
I do see strangeness but scarce misery,  
Now it is over, and no danger more.

511 *Ib.*

Being right now, I am happy and color things.  
Yes, everybody that leaves life sees all  
Softened and bettered : so with other sights :  
To me at least was never evening yet  
But seemed far beautifuller than its day,  
For past is past.

512 *Ib.*

I answered, " He will come."  
And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up  
To God the strong, God the beneficent,  
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,  
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,  
Till at the last he puts forth might and saves.

521 *Ib.*

Could we by a wish  
Have what we will and get the future now,  
Would we wish aught done undone in the past ?  
So, let him wait God's instant men call years ;  
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,  
Do out the duty ! Through such souls alone  
God stooping shows sufficient of his light  
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.

525 *Ib.*

Why comes temptation but for man to meet  
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,  
And so be pedestalled in triumph ? Pray  
" Lead us into no such temptations, Lord ! "  
Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,  
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,  
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,  
That so he may do battle and have praise :

564 *Ib.*

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Whereat the hero, who was truth itself,  
 Let out the smile again, repressed awhile  
 Like fountain-brilliance one forbids to play.  
 He did too many grandnesses, to note  
 Much in the meaner things about his path :  
 And stepping there, with face towards the sun,  
 Stopped seldom to pluck weeds or ask their names.

614 *Balaustion's Adventure.*

Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world !  
 I think this is the authentic sign and seal  
 Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,  
 And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts  
 Into a rage to suffer for mankind,  
 And recommence at sorrow : drops like seed  
 After the blossom, ultimate of all.  
 Say, does the seed scorn earth and seek the sun ?  
 Surely it has no other end and aim  
 Than to drop, once more die into the ground,  
 Taste cold and darkness and oblivion there :  
 And thence rise, tree-like grow through pain to joy,  
 More joy and most joy,—do man good again.

620 *Ib.*

All regulated by the single care  
 I' the last resort—that I made thoroughly serve  
 The when and how, toiled where was need, reposed  
 As resolutely at the proper point,  
 Braved sorrow, courted joy, to just one end :  
 Namely, that just the creature I was bound  
 To be, I should become, nor thwart at all  
 God's purpose in creation. I conceive  
 No other duty possible to man,—  
 Highest mind, lowest mind,—no other law  
 By which to judge life failure or success :  
 What folk call being saved or cast away.

684 *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.*

The love of peace, care for the family,  
 Contentment with what's bad but might be worse—  
 Good movements these ! and good, too, discontent,  
 So long as that spurs good, which might be best,  
 Into becoming better, anyhow.

686 *Ib.*

The more I thank God, like my grandmother,  
 For making me a little lower than  
 The angels, honor-clothed and glory-crowned :  
 This is the honor,—that no thing I know,  
 Feel or conceive, but I can make my own  
 Somehow, by use of hand or head or heart:  
 This is the glory,—that in all conceived,  
 Or felt or known, I recognize a mind  
 Not mine but like mine,—for the double joy,—  
 Making all things for me and me for Him.

687 *Ib.*

He recognized that for great minds i' the world  
 There is no trial like the appropriate one  
 Of leaving little minds their liberty  
 Of littleness to blunder on through life,  
 Now aiming at right ends by foolish means,  
 Now, at absurd achievement through the aid  
 Of good and wise endeavor—to acquiesce  
 In folly's life-long privilege, though with power  
 To do the little minds the good they need,  
 Despite themselves, by just abolishing  
 Their right to play the part and fill the place  
 I' the scheme of things He schemed who made alike  
 Great minds and little minds, saw use for each.

693 *Ib.*

Genius has somewhat of the infantine :  
 But of the childish, not a touch nor taint  
 Except through self-will, which, being foolishness,  
 Is certain, soon or late, of punishment.

698 *Ib.*

Partake my confidence! No creature's made so mean  
 But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,  
 Its supreme worth : fulfills, by ordinance of fate,  
 Its momentary task, gets glory all its own,  
 Tastes triumph in the world, preeminent, alone.  
 Where is the single grain of sand, 'mid millions heaped  
 Confusedly on the beach, but, did we know, has leaped  
 Or will leap, would we wait, i' the century, some once,  
 To the very throne of things ?—earth's brightest for the nonce,  
 When sunshine shall impinge on just that grain's facette  
 Which fronts him fullest, first, returns his ray with jet  
 Of promptest praise, thanks God best in creation's name !

707 *Fifine at the Fair.*

Humanity's mishap : the wrinkled brow, bald pate,  
 And rheumy eyes of Age, peak'd chin and parchment chap,  
 Were signs of day-work done, and wage-time near,—mishap  
 Merely ; but, Age reduced to simple greed and guile,  
 Worn apathetic else as some smooth slab, erewhile  
 A clear-cut man-at-arms i' the pavement, till foot's tread  
 Effaced the sculpture, left the stone you saw instead,—  
 Was not that terrible beyond the mere uncouth ?  
 Well, and perhaps the next revolting you was Youth,  
 Stark ignorance and crude conceit, half smirk, half stare  
 On that frank fool-face, gay beneath its head of hair  
 Which covers nothing.

726 *Ib.*

Love proffered and accepted then and there !  
 Such potency in word and look has truth.

Truth I say, truth I mean : this love was true,  
 And the rest happened by due consequence.  
 By which we are to learn that there exists

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

A falsish false, for truth's inside the same,  
And truth that's only half true, falsish truth.

749 *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.*

Body and soul are one thing, with two names  
For more or less elaborated stuff.

Such is the new *Religio Medici*.  
Though antiquated faith held otherwise,  
Explained that body is not soul, but just  
Soul's servant : that, if soul be satisfied,  
Possess already joy or pain enough,  
It uses to ignore, as master may,  
What increase, joy or pain, its servant brings—  
Superfluous contribution : soul, once served,  
Has naught to do with body's service more.

759 *Ib.*

Clara, I hold the happier specimen,—  
It may be, through that artist-preference  
For work complete, inferiorly proposed,  
To incompleteness, though it aim aright.  
Morally, no ! Aspire, break bounds ! I say,  
Endeavor to be good, and better still,  
And best ! Success is naught, endeavor's all.  
But intellect adjusts the means to ends,  
Tries the low thing, and leaves it done, at least ;  
No prejudice to high thing, intellect  
Would do and will do, only give the means.

771 *Ib.*

“ But—loved him ? ” Friend, I do not praise her love !  
True love works never for the loved one so,  
Nor spares skin-surface, smoothening truth away.  
Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace  
Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.  
“ Worship not me, but God ! ” the angels urge :  
That is love's grandeur : still, in pettier love  
The nice eye can distinguish grade and grade.

772 *Ib.*

Have you found your life distasteful ?  
My life did and does smack sweet.  
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful ?  
Mine I saved and hold complete.  
Do your joys with age diminish ?  
When mine fail me, I'll complain.  
Must in death your daylight finish ?  
My sun sets to rise again.

I find earth not gray but rosy,  
Heaven not grim but fair of hue.  
Do I stoop ? I pluck a posy.  
Do I stand and stare ? All's blue.

808 *At the Mermaid.*

## MORAL AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS.

93

And whither went he ? Ask himself,  
Not me ! To change of scene, I think.  
Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,  
Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,  
Nor all his music—money-chink.

Because a man has shop to mind  
In time and place, since flesh must live,  
Needs spirit lack all life behind,  
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,  
All loves except what trade can give?

I want to know a butcher paints,  
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,  
Candlestick-maker much acquaints  
His soul with song, or, haply mute,  
Blows out his brains upon the flute !

But—shop each day and all day long !  
Friend, your good angel slept, your star  
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong !  
From where these sorts of treasures are,  
There should our hearts be—Christ, how far !

810 *Shop.*

" Anyhow, we want it : wherefore want ? " Because, without the want,  
Life, now human, would be brutish : just that hope, however scant,  
Makes the actual life worth leading ; take the hope therein away,  
All we have to do is surely not endure another day.

853 *La Saisiaz.\**

Only grant a second life ; I acquiesce  
In this present life as failure, count misfortune's worst assaults  
Triumph, not defeat, assured that loss so much the more exalts  
Gain about to be.

855 *Ib.*

Life to come will be improvement on the life that's now ; destroy  
Body's thwartings, there's no longer screen betwixt soul and soul's joy.  
Why should we expect new hindrance, novel tether ? In this first  
Life, I see the good of evil, why our world began at worst :

\* *La Saisiaz* (Savoyard for "The Sun") is the name of a villa near Geneva where Mr. Browning, his sister, and a very dear friend, Miss A. Egerton-Smith, spent part of the summer of 1877. Miss Smith died there very suddenly, September 14 of that year, and the poem, named from the place, is written in her memory. It discusses beautifully and profoundly the question of immortality suggested by her loss, and proceeds on the basis that this present life is without meaning or rationality unless it is one of probation presupposing a life beyond. We give five brief extracts from this poem (those between pp. 849 and 859) in the previous section, "Brief Felicities and Fancies."

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Since time means amelioration, tardily enough displayed,  
 Yet a mainly onward moving, never wholly retrograde.  
 We know more though we know little, we grow stronger though still weak,  
 Partly see though all too purblind, stammer though we cannot speak.  
 There is no such grudge in God as scared the ancient Greek.

855 *Ib.*

What a load he stumbles under through his glad sad seventy years,  
 When a touch sets right the turmoil, lifts his spirit where, flesh-freed,  
 Knowledge shall be rightly named so, all that seems be truth indeed !  
 Grant his forces no accession, nay, no faculty's increase,  
 Only let what now exists continue, let him prove in peace  
 Power whereof the interrupted unperfected play enticed  
 Man through darkness, which to lighten any spark of hope sufficed,—  
 What shall then deter his dying out of darkness into light ?

856 *Ib.*

Only make as plain  
 As that man now lives, that, after dying, man will live again,—  
 Make as plain the absence, also, of a law to contravene  
 Voluntary passage from this life to that by change of scene,—  
 And I bid him—at suspicion of first cloud athwart his sky,  
 Flower's departure, frost's arrival—never hesitate, but die !

856 *Ib.*

Quiétude ! For, be very sure of this !  
 A twelvemonth hence, and men shall know or care  
 As much for what to-day they clap or hiss  
 As for the fashion of the wigs they wear,  
 Then wonder at. There's fame.

872 *The Two Poets of Croisic.*

Dear, shall I tell you ? There's a simple test  
 Would serve, when people take on them to weigh  
 The worth of poets. "Who was better, best,  
 This, that, the other bard ?" (Bards none gainsay  
 As good, observe ! no matter for the rest.)  
 "What quality preponderating may  
 Turn the scale as it trembles ?" End the strife  
 By asking "Which one led a happy life ?"

If one did, over his antagonist  
 That yelled or shrieked or sobbed or wept or wailed  
 Or simply had the dumps,—dispute who list,—  
 I count him victor. Where his fellow failed,  
 Mastered by his own means of might,—acquist  
 Of necessary sorrows,—he prevailed,  
 A strong since joyful man who stood distinct  
 Above slave-sorrows to his chariot linked.

872 *Ib.*

Put pain from out the world, what room were left  
 For thanks to God, for love to Man ?

936 *Ferishtah's Fancies.\**


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\* President A. H. Strong says : " *Ferishtah's Fancies*, thought by some to be only a collection of slight poems, seems to me to be one of the most

So, with thy squeamish scruple. What imports  
Fasting or feasting ? Do thy day's work, dare  
Refuse no help thereto, since help refused  
Is hindrance sought and found.

938 *Ib.*

Just as I cannot, till myself convinced,  
Impart conviction, so, to deal forth joy  
Adroitly, needs must I know joy myself.  
Renounce joy for my fellows' sake ? That's joy  
Beyond joy ; but renounced for mine, not theirs ?  
Why, the physician called to help the sick,  
Cries " Let me, first of all, discard my health ! "  
No, Son : the richness hearted in such joy  
Is in the knowing what are gifts we give,  
Not in a vain endeavor not to know !  
Therefore, desire joy and thank God for it !

938 *Ib.*

Never enough faith in omnipotence,—  
Never too much, by parity, of faith  
In impuissance, man's—which turns to strength  
When once acknowledged weakness every way.

938 *Ib.*

The prize is in the process : knowledge means  
Ever-renewed assurance by defeat  
That victory is somehow still to reach,  
But love is victory, the prize itself.

940 *Ib.*

Consider well !  
Were knowledge all thy faculty, then God  
Must be ignored : love gains him by first leap.  
Frankly accept the creatureship : ask good  
To love for : press bold to the tether's end  
Allotted to this life's intelligence !  
" So we offend ? " Will it offend thyself  
If—impuissance praying potency—  
Thy child beseech that thou command the sun  
Rise bright to-morrow—thou, he thinks supreme  
In power and goodness, why shouldst thou refuse ?  
Afterward, when the child matures, perchance  
The fault were greater if, with wit full-grown,

significant examples of the poet's irresistible tendency to the expression of religious ideas. In these slight poems I find the following subjects successively treated: 1. God works no unnecessary miracles. 2. Let us give thanks for actual blessings, though much that we desire may fail us. 3. Faith and love go together. 4. Pray on, though you see no answer to your prayers. 5. The purpose of suffering is purification. 6. The punishment of sin is the dwarfing of nature. 7. Asceticism fails of its own end. 8. Love must go before knowledge. 9. Life is worth the living. I think no one can read over this list without being convinced that here is a poet who believes in God as well as in the soul."

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

The stripling dared to ask for a dinar,  
 Than that the boy cried "Pluck Sitara down  
 And give her me to play with!" 'Tis for him  
 To have no bounds to his belief in thee :  
 For thee it also is to let her shine  
 Lustrous and lonely, so best serving him !

941 *Ib.*

"Was it for mere fool's-play, make-believe and mumming,  
 So we battled it like men, not boylike sulked or whined?  
 Each of us heard clang God's 'Come!' and each was coming :  
 Soldiers all, to forward-face, not sneaks to lag behind !

"How of the field's fortune? That concerned our Leader!  
 Led, we struck our stroke nor cared for doings left and right :  
 Each as on his sole head, failer or succeeder,  
 Lay the blame or lit the praise : no care for cowards : fight!"

946 *Ib.*

No, Man's the prerogative—knowledge once gained—  
 To ignore,—find new knowledge to press for, to swerve  
 In pursuit of, no, not for a moment : attained—  
 Why, onward through ignorance! Dare and deserve!  
 As still to its asymptote speedeth the curve,

So approximates Man—Thee, who, reachable not,  
 Hast formed him to yearningly follow Thy whole  
 Sole and single omniscience!

985 *Parleyings.*

Then life is—to wake not sleep,  
 Rise and not rest, but press  
 From earth's level where blindly creep  
 Things perfected, more or less,  
 To the heaven's height, far and steep,

Where, amid what strifes and storms  
 May wait the adventurous quest,  
 Power is Love—transports, transforms  
 Who aspired from worst to best,  
 Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms'.

I have faith such end shall be:  
 From the first, Power was—I knew.  
 Life has made clear to me  
 That, strive but for closer view,  
 Love were as plain to see.

When see? When there dawns a day,  
 If not on the homely earth,  
 Then yonder, worlds away,  
 Where the strange and new have birth,  
 And Power comes full in play.

1006 *Asolando.*

## GEMS OF DESCRIPTION.

## I. BEAUTIES OF NATURE.

THOU wilt remember one warm morn when winter  
Crept aged from the earth, and spring's first breath  
Blew soft from the moist hills ; the black-thorn boughs,  
So dark in the bare wood, when glistening  
In the sunshine were white with coming buds,  
Like the bright side of a sorrow, and the banks  
Had violets opening from sleep like eyes.

3 *Pauline.*

As some world-wanderer sees in a far meadow  
Strange towers and high-walled gardens thick with trees,  
Where song takes shelter and delicious mirth  
From laughing fairy creatures peeping over,  
And on the morrow when he comes to lie  
Forever 'neath those garden-trees fruit-flushed  
Sung round by fairies, all his search is vain.

6 *Ib.*

Too soon I found all faith had gone from me,  
And the late glow of life, like change on clouds,  
Proved not the morn-blush widening into day,  
But eve faint-colored by the dying sun  
While darkness hastens quickly.

7 *Ib.*

Night, and one single ridge of narrow path  
Between the sullen river and the woods  
Waving and muttering, for the moonless night  
Has shaped them into images of life,  
Like the uprising of the giant-ghosts,  
Looking on earth to know how their sons fare.

We will pass to morning—

Morning, the rocks and valleys and old woods.  
How the sun brightens in the mist, and here,  
Half in the air, like creatures of the place,  
Trusting the element, living on high boughs  
That swing in the wind—look at the silver spray  
Flung from the foam-sheet of the cataract  
Amid the broken rocks ! Shall we stay here  
With the wild hawks ? No, ere the hot noon come,  
Dive we down—safe ! See this our new retreat  
Walled in with a sloped mound of matted shrubs,  
Dark, tangled, old and green, still sloping down  
To a small pool whose waters lie asleep  
Amid the trailing boughs turned water-plants :  
And tall trees overarch to keep us in,  
Breaking the sunbeams into emerald shafts,

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

And in the dreamy water one small group  
 Of two or three strange trees are got together  
 Wondering at all around, as strange beasts herd  
 Together far from their own land : all wildness,  
 No turf nor moss, for boughs and plants pave all,  
 And tongues of bank go shelving in the lymph,  
 Where the pale-throated snake reclines his head,  
 And old gray stones lie making eddies there,  
 The wild mice cross them dry-shod. Deeper in !  
 Shut thy soft eyes—now look—still deeper in !  
 This is the very heart of the woods all round  
 Mountain-like heaped above us ; yet even here  
 One pond of water gleams ; far off the river  
 Sweeps like a sea, barred out from land ; but one—  
 One thin clear sheet has overleaped and wound  
 Into this silent depth, which gained, it lies  
 Still, as but let by sufferance ; the trees bend  
 O'er it as wild men watch a sleeping girl,  
 And through their roots long creeping plants outstretch  
 Their twined hair, steeped and sparkling ; farther on,  
 Tall rushes and thick flag-knots have combined  
 To narrow it ; so, at length, a silver thread,  
 It winds, all noiselessly through the deep wood  
 Till through a cleft-way, through the moss and stone,  
 It joins its parent-river with a shout.

Up for the glowing day, leave the old woods !  
 See, they part like a ruined arch : the sky !  
 Nothing but sky appears, so close the roots  
 And grass of the hill-top level with the air—  
 Blue sunny air, where a great cloud floats laden  
 With light, like a dead whale that white birds pick,  
 Floating away in the sun in some north sea.  
 Air, air, fresh life-blood, thin and searching air,  
 The clear, dear breath of God that loveth us,  
 Where small birds reel and winds take their delight !  
 Water is beautiful, but not like air :  
 See, where the solid azure waters lie  
 Made as of thickened air, and down below,  
 The fern-ranks like a forest spread themselves  
 As though each pore could feel the element.

8 Ib.

Come, I will show you where my merit lies.  
 'Tis in the advance of individual minds  
 That the slow crowd should ground their expectation  
 Eventually to follow ; as the sea  
 Waits ages in its bed till some one wave  
 Out of the multitudinous mass, extends  
 The empire of the whole, some feet perhaps,  
 Over the strip of sand which could confine  
 Its fellows so long time : thenceforth the rest,  
 Even to the meanest, hurry in at once,  
 And so much is clear gained. I shall be glad

If all my labors, failing of aught else,  
Suffice to make such inroad and procure  
A wider range for thought: nay, they do this.

33 *Paracelsus.*

Best ope the casement: see,  
The night, late strewn with clouds and flying stars,  
Is blank and motionless: how peaceful sleep  
The tree-tops altogether! Like an asp,  
The wind slips whispering from bough to bough.

See, morn at length. The heavy darkness seems  
Diluted, gray and clear without the stars;  
The shrubs bestir and rouse themselves as if  
Some snake, that weighed them down all night, let go  
His hold; and from the East, fuller and fuller  
Day, like a mighty river, flowing in;  
But clouded, wintry, desolate and cold.

34 *Ib.*

The center-fire heaves underneath the earth,  
And the earth changes like a human face;  
The molten ore bursts up among the rocks,  
Winds into the stone's heart, outbranches bright  
In hidden mines, spots barren river-beds,  
Crumbles into fine sand where sunbeams bask—  
God joys therein. The wroth sea's waves are edged  
With foam, white as the bitten lip of hate,  
When, in the solitary waste, strange groups  
Of young volcanoes come up, cyclops-like,  
Staring together with their eyes on flame—  
God tastes a pleasure in their uncouth pride.  
Then all is still; earth is a wintry clod:  
But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passes  
Over its breast to waken it, rare verdure  
Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between  
The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,  
Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face;  
The grass grows bright, the boughs are swoln with blooms  
Like chrysalids impatient for the air,  
The shining dors are busy, beetles run  
Along the furrows, ants make their ado;  
Above, birds fly in merry flocks, the lark  
Soars up and up, shivering for very joy;  
Afar the ocean sleeps; white fishing-gulls  
Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe  
Of nested limpets; savage creatures seek  
Their loves in wood and plain—and God renews  
His ancient rapture. Thus he dwells in all,  
From life's minute beginnings, up at last  
To man—the consummation of this scheme  
Of being, the completion of this sphere  
Of life: whose attributes had here and there  
Been scattered o'er the visible world before,

Asking to be combined, dim fragments meant  
 To be united in some wondrous whole,  
 Imperfect qualities throughout creation,  
 Suggesting some one creature yet to make,  
 Some point where all those scattered rays should meet  
 Convergent in the faculties of man.

46 *Ib.*

The herded pines commune and have deep thoughts,  
 A secret they assemble to discuss  
 When the sun drops behind their trunks, which glare  
 Like grates of hell.

47 *Ib.*

That autumn eve was stilled :  
 A last remains of sunset dimly burned  
 O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned  
 By the wind back upon its bearer's hand  
 In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand,  
 The woods beneath lay black.

75 *Sordello.*

Day !  
 Faster and more fast,  
 O'er night's brim, day boils at last ;  
 Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim  
 Where spouting and suppressed it lay,  
 For not a froth-flake touched the rim  
 Of yonder gap in the solid gray  
 Of the eastern cloud, an hour away ;  
 But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,  
 Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,  
 Rose, reddened, and its seething breast  
 Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.

129 *Pippa Passes.*

O, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,  
 This autumn morning ! How he sets his bones  
 To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet  
 For the ripple to run over in its mirth ;  
 Listening the while, where on the heap of stones  
 The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

375 *James Lee's Wife.*

By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes  
 Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,  
 Bare, broken only by that tree or two  
 Against the sudden bloody splendor poured  
 Cursewise in day's departure by the sun  
 O'er the low house-roof of that squalid inn  
 Where they three, for the first time and the last,  
 Husband and wife and priest, met face to face.

419 *The Ring and the Book.*

\* I stood at Naples once, a night so dark

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\* Mr. William Sharp, who is not afraid to criticise Browning in general and *The Ring and the Book* in particular very freely, calls this passage "the high-water mark of modern blank verse."

I could have scarce conjectured there was earth  
 Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all :  
 But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—  
 Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,  
 Through her whole length of mountain visible :  
 There lay the city thick and plain with spires,  
 And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.

572 *Ib.*

Like some dread heapy blackness, ruffled wing,  
 Convulsed and cowering head that is all eye,  
 Which proves a ruined eagle who, too blind  
 Swooping in quest o' the quarry, fawn or kid,  
 Descried deep down the chasm 'twixt rock and rock,  
 Has wedged and mortised, into either wall  
 O' the mountain, the pent earthquake of his power ;  
 So lies, half hurtless yet still terrible,  
 Just when—who stalks up, who stands front to front,  
 But the great lion-guarder of the gorge,  
 Lord of the ground, a stationed glory there !  
 Yet he too pauses ere he try the worst  
 O' the frightful unfamiliar nature, new  
 To the chasm, indeed, but elsewhere known enough,  
 Among the shadows and the silences  
 Above i' the sky : so, each antagonist  
 Silently faced his fellow and forbore.

606 *Balaustion's Adventure.*

Not long quenched ! As the flame, just hurried off  
 The brand's edge, suddenly renews its bite,  
 Tasting some richness caked i' the core o' the tree,—  
 Pine, with a blood that's oil,—and triumphs up  
 Pillar-wise to the sky and saves the world :  
 So, in a spasm and splendor of resolve,  
 All at once did the God surmount the man.

620 *Ib.*

If on the day when Spring's green girlishness  
 Grew nubile, and she trembled into May,  
 And our Miranda climbed to clasp the Spring  
 A-tiptoe o'er the sea, those wafts of warmth,  
 Those cloudlets scudding under the bare blue.

761 *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.*

He leans into a living glory-bath  
 Of air and light where seems to float and move  
 The wooded watered country, hill and dale  
 And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist,  
 A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift  
 O' the sun-touched dew.

774 *Inn Album.*

Boundingly up through Night's wall dense and dark,  
 Embattled crags and clouds, outbroke the Sun  
 Above the conscious earth, and one by one  
 Her heights and depths absorbed to the last spark

His fluid glory, from the far fine ridge  
 Of mountain-granite which, transformed to gold,  
 Laughed first the thanks back, to the vale's dusk fold  
 On fold of vapor-swathing, like a bridge  
 Shattered beneath some giant's stamp.

954 *Parleyings.*

## II. BIOGRAPHICAL.

## SHELLEY.

Sun-treader, life and light be thine forever !  
 Thou art gone from us ; years go by and spring  
 Gladdens and the young earth is beautiful,  
 Yet thy songs come not, other bards arise,  
 But none like thee : they stand, thy majesties,  
 Like mighty works which tell some spirit there  
 Hath sat regardless of neglect and scorn,  
 Till, its long task completed, it hath risen  
 And left us, never to return, and all  
 Rush in to peer and praise when all in vain.  
 The air seems bright with thy past presence yet,  
 But thou art still for me as thou hast been  
 When I have stood with thee as on a throne  
 With all thy dim creations gathered round  
 Like mountains, and I felt of mold like them,  
 And with them creatures of my own were mixed,  
 Like things half-lived, catching and giving life.  
 But thou art still for me who have adored  
 Though single, panting but to hear thy name  
 Which I believed a spell to me alone,  
 Scarce deeming thou wast as a star to men !  
 As one should worship long a sacred spring  
 Scarce worth a moth's flitting, which long grasses cross,  
 And one small tree embowers droopingly—  
 Joying to see some wandering insect won  
 To live in its few rushes, or some locust  
 To pasture on its boughs, or some wild bird  
 Stoop for its freshness from the trackless air:  
 And then should find it but the fountain-head,  
 Long lost, of some great river washing towns  
 And towers, and seeing old woods which will live  
 But by its banks untrod of human foot,  
 Which, when the great sun sinks, lie quivering  
 In light as some thing lieth half of life  
 Before God's foot, waiting a wondrous change ;  
 Then girt with rocks which seek to turn or stay  
 Its course in vain, for it does ever spread  
 Like a sea's arm as it goes rolling on,  
 Being the pulse of some great country—so  
 Wast thou to me, and art thou to the world !

4 *Pauline.*

## LUTHER.

Pray, does Luther dream  
 His arguments convince by their own force  
 The crowds that own his doctrine? No, indeed!  
 His plain denial of established points  
 Ages had sanctified and men supposed  
 Could never be oppugned while earth was under  
 And heaven above them—points which chance or time  
 Affected not—did more than the array  
 Of argument which followed. Boldly deny!  
 There is much breath-stopping, hair-stiffening  
 Awhile; then, amazed glances, mute awaiting  
 The thunderbolt which does not come: and next,  
 Reproachful wonder and inquiry; those  
 Who else had never stirred, are able now  
 To find the rest out for themselves, perhaps  
 To outstrip him who set the whole at work,  
 —As never will my wise class its instructor.  
 And you saw Luther?

*Festus.* 'Tis a wondrous soul!  
*Par.* True: the so-heavy chain which galled mankind  
 Is shattered, and the noblest of us all  
 Must bow to the deliverer—nay, the worker  
 Of our own project—we who long before  
 Had burst our trammels, but forgot the crowd,  
 We should have taught, still groaned beneath their load:  
 This he has done and nobly.

33 *Paracelsus.*

## DANTE.

Dante, pacer of the shore  
 Where glutted hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,  
 Unbiten by its whirring sulphur-spume—  
 Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope  
 Into a darkness quieted by hope;  
 Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye  
 In gracious twilights where his chosen lie.

78 *Sordello.*

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:  
 Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."  
 While he mused and traced it and retraced it,  
 (Peradventure with a pen corroded  
 Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,  
 When, his left hand i' the hair o' the wicked,  
 Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,  
 Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,  
 Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,  
 Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—  
 Dante, who loved well because he hated,  
 Hated wickedness that hinders loving,  
 Dante standing, studying his angel,—  
 In there broke the folk of his Inferno.  
 Says he—"Certain people of importance"

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)  
 "Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."  
 Says the poet—"Then I stopped my painting."

You and I would rather see that angel,  
 Painted by the tenderness of Dante,  
 Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno.

You and I will never see that picture.  
 While he mused on love and Beatrice,  
 While he softened o'er his outlined angel,  
 In they broke, those "people of importance :"  
 We and Bice bear the loss forever.

362 *One Word More.*

LOUIS XVI.

Do not you see poor Louis pushed to front  
 Of palace-window, in persuasion's name,  
 A spectacle above the howling mob  
 Who tasted, as it were, with tiger-smack,  
 The outstart, the first spurt of blood on brow,  
 The Phrygian symbol, the new crown of thorns,  
 The Cap of Freedom? See the feeble mirth  
 At odds with that half-purpose to be strong  
 And merely patient under misery!  
 And note the ejaculation, ground so hard  
 Between his teeth, that only God could hear,  
 As the lean pale proud insignificance  
 With the sharp-featured liver-worried stare  
 Out of the two gray points that did him stead,  
 And passed their eagle-owner to the front  
 Better than his mob-elbowed undersize,—  
 The Corsican lieutenant commented,  
 "Had I but one good regiment of my own,  
 How soon should volleys to the due amount  
 Lay stiff upon the street-flags this canaille!  
 As for the droll there, he that plays the king,  
 And screws out smile with a Red night-cap on,  
 He's done for! somebody must take his place."

739 *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.*

MRS. BROWNING.

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird,  
 And all a wonder and a wild desire,—  
 Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,  
 Took sanctuary within the holier blue,  
 And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—  
 Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—  
 When the first summons from the darkling earth  
 Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,  
 And bared them of the glory—to drop down,  
 To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—  
 This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?

Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help !  
 Never may I commence my song, my due  
 To God who best taught song by gift of thee,  
 Except with bent head and beseeching hand—  
 That still, despite the distance and the dark,  
 What was, again may be ; some interchange  
 Of grace, some splendor once thy very thought,  
 Some benediction anciently thy smile :  
 —Never conclude, but raising hand and head  
 Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn  
 For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,  
 Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back  
 In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,  
 Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,  
 Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall !

427 *The Ring and the Book.*

#### A STORY ABOUT ST. JOHN.

There might be fitter subjects to allure ;  
 Still, neither misconceive my portraiture  
 Nor undervalue its adornments quaint :  
 What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint.  
 Ponder a story ancient pens transmit,  
 Then say if you condemn me or acquit.

John the Beloved, banished Antioch  
 For Patmos, bade collectively his flock  
 Farewell, but set apart the closing eve  
 To comfort those his exile most would grieve,  
 He knew : a touching spectacle, that house  
 In motion to receive him ! Xanthus' spouse  
 You missed, made panther's meat a month since ; but  
 Xanthus himself (his nephew 'twas, they shut  
 'Twixt boards and sawed asunder), Polycarp,  
 Soft Charicle, next year no wheel could warp  
 To swear by Cæsar's fortune, with the rest  
 Were ranged ; through whom the gray disciple pressed,  
 Busily blessing right and left, just stopped  
 To pat one infant's curls, the hangman cropped  
 Soon after, reached the portal. On its hinge  
 The door turns and he enters : what quick twinge  
 Ruins the smiling mouth, those wide eyes fix  
 Whereon, why like some spectral candlestick's  
 Branch the disciple's arms ? Dead swooned he, woke  
 Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp, heartbroke,  
 "Get thee behind me, Satan ! Have I toiled  
 To no more purpose ? Is the gospel foiled  
 Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,  
 Portrayed with sooty garb and features swarth—  
 Ah, Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled  
 To see the—the—the Devil domiciled ?"

Whereto sobbed Xanthus, "Father, 'tis yourself  
Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf  
Went to procure against to-morrow's loss ;  
And that's no twy-prong, but a pastoral cross,  
You're painted with ! "

His puckered brows unfold—  
And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

101 *Sordello.*

### III. MISCELLANEOUS.

My life has not been that of those whose heaven  
Was lampless save where poesy shone out ;  
But as a clime where glittering mountain-tops  
And glancing sea and forests steeped in light  
Give back reflected the far-flashing sun ;  
For music (which is earnest of a heaven,  
Seeing we know emotions strange by it,  
Not else to be revealed) is like a voice,  
A low voice calling fancy, as a friend,  
To the green woods in the gay summer time :  
And she fills all the way with dancing shapes  
Which have made painters pale, and they go on  
Till stars look at them and winds call to them  
As they leave life's path for the twilight world  
Where the dead gather.

5 *Pauline.*

Luitolfo was the proper  
Friend-making, everywhere friend-finding soul,  
Fit for the sunshine, so, it followed him.  
A happy-tempered bringer of the best  
Out of the worst ; who bears with what's past cure,  
And puts so good a face on 't—wisely passive  
Where action's fruitless, while he remedies  
In silence what the foolish rail against ;  
A man to smooth such natures as parade  
Of opposition must exasperate ;  
No general gauntlet-gatherer for the weak  
Against the strong, yet over-scrupulous  
At lucky junctures ; one who won't forego  
The after-battle work of binding wounds,  
Because, forsooth he'd have to bring himself  
To side with wound-inflicters for their leave !

290 *A Soul's Tragedy.*

For, don't you mark ? we're made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;  
And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that ;  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,  
Your cullion's hanging face ? A bit of chalk,  
And trust me but you should, though ! How much more,

If I drew higher things with the same truth !  
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,  
 Interpret God to all of you ! O, O,  
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do  
 And we in our graves ! This world's no blot for us,  
 Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :  
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

345 *Fra Lippo.*

The strange and passionate precipitance  
 Of maiden startled into motherhood  
 Which changes body and soul by nature's law.  
 So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come  
 For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,  
 And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart  
 To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,  
 For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk  
 Contest the prize,—wherefore, she knows not yet.

454 *The Ring and the Book.*

Learn  
 This lesson, that our human speech is naught,  
 Our human testimony false, our fame  
 And human estimation words and wind.  
 Why take the artistic way to prove so much ?  
 Because, it is the glory and good of Art,  
 That Art remains the one way possible  
 Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.  
 How look a brother in the face and say,  
 "Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind ;  
 Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length:  
 And, O, the foolishness thou countest faith !"  
 Say this as silverly as tongue can troll—  
 The anger of the man may be endured,  
 The shrug, the disappointed eyes of him  
 Are not so bad to bear—but here's the plague  
 That all this trouble comes of telling truth,  
 Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false,  
 Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,  
 Nor recognizable by whom it left :  
 While falsehood would have done the work of truth.  
 But Art,—wherein man nowise speaks to men,  
 Only to mankind,—Art may tell a truth  
 Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,  
 Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.  
 So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,  
 Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—  
 So, note by note, bring music from your mind,  
 Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived,—  
 So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,  
 Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

And save the soul ! If this intent save mine,—  
 If the rough ore rounded to a ring,

Render all duty which good ring should do,  
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,—  
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,  
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)  
Linking our England to his Italy !

601 *The Ring and the Book.*\*

What's poetry except a power that makes ?  
And, speaking to one sense, inspires the rest,  
Pressing them all into its service ; so  
That who sees painting, seems to hear as well  
The speech that's proper for the painted mouth ;

\* These are the closing lines of the great poem, and set forth what may be called its moral, or chief purpose, namely, to emphasize the function of Art as the intermediate agency of personality. We have already referred in two places to this wonderful production, and have given many extracts from it, but it seems fitting that now as we leave it a few other words should be said, that the reader may be induced to gird himself for grappling with it.

Professor Dawson's tribute to it is this : " In force of conception and skill and delicacy of treatment, subtlety of thought, purity, power, and passion, *The Ring and the Book* is Browning's masterpiece ; it is the work of a giant." Professor Corson : " It is richer in materials of the most varied character than any other long poem in existence." Professor Henry Jones : " Both in its moral wisdom and artistic worth it marks the high tide of Browning's poetic insight." Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman : " As a product of the intellect it surpasses all his other poems ; a rhythmical marvel ; the extreme of realistic art ; the thought, vocabulary, imagery, and wisdom lavished upon this story would equip a score of ordinary writers and place them beyond danger of neglect." Professor Sidney Colvin : " Into these amazing volumes are packed thought enough, and experience enough, and tragedy enough, and comedy enough, and poetry enough to overstock not a book, but a library. The inexhaustible vivacity of humor, the burning tenderness and knowledge of life and literature pressed down and running over, the masterly range of style, but above all the trenchant human insight, guided by such manly nobility of instinct as helps a poet to make straight at the substance of truth as well as to grasp each of its differing shadows in turn." President A. H. Strong : " I regard this poem as the greatest work of creative imagination that has appeared since the time of Shakespeare. . . . I know of no poem in all literature in which the greatness of human nature so looms up before you or which so convinces you that a whole heaven or a whole hell may be wrapped up in the compass of a single soul."

And who hears music, feels his solitude  
 Peopled at once—for how count heartbeats plain  
 Unless a company, with hearts which beat,  
 Come close to the musician, seen or no ?  
 And who receives true verse at eye or ear,  
 Takes in (with verse) time, place, and person too,  
 So, links each sense on to its sister-sense,  
 Grace-like : and what if but one sense of three  
 Front you at once ? The sidelong pair conceive  
 Through faintest touch of finest finger-tips,—  
 Hear, see, and feel, in faith's simplicity,  
 Alike, what one was sole recipient of :  
 Who hears the poem, therefore, sees the play.

605 *Balaustion's Adventure.*

(Suppose I should prefer " He said "?  
 Along with every act—and speech is act—  
 There go, a multitude impalpable  
 To ordinary human faculty,  
 The thoughts which give the act significance.  
 Who is a poet needs must apprehend  
 Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to speak.  
 Part these, and thought withdraws to poetry :  
 Speech is reported in the newspaper.)

765 *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.*

I have danced through day  
 On tiptoe at the music of a word,  
 Have wondered where was darkness gone as night  
 Burst out in stars at brilliance of a smile !  
 Lonely, I placed the chair to help me seat  
 Your fancied presence ; in companionship,  
 I kept my finger constant to your glove  
 Glued to my breast ; then—where was all the world ?  
 I schemed—not dreamed—how I might die some death  
 Should save your finger aching !

791 *The Inn Album.*

## COMPLETE POEMS.

## PIPPA'S SONGS.\*

## I.

THE year's at the spring  
 And day's at the morn ;  
 Morning's at seven ;  
 The hillside's dew-peared ;  
 The lark's on the wing ;  
 The snail's on the thorn :  
 God's in his heaven—  
 All's right with the world !

## II.

All service ranks the same with God :  
 If now, as formerly he trod ;  
 Paradise, his presence fills  
 Our earth, each only as God wills  
 Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,  
 Are we ; there is no last nor first.

Say not "a small event !" Why "small" ?  
 Costs it more pain that this, ye call  
 A "great event," should come to pass,  
 Than that ? Untwine me from the mass  
 Of deeds which make up life, one deed  
 Power shall fall short in or exceed !

## III.

Overhead the tree-tops meet,  
 Flowers and grass spring 'neath one's feet ;  
 There was naught above me, naught below,  
 My childhood had not learned to know :

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\* The drama, *Pippa Passes* (date 1841), from which these three songs are taken, and from which some other extracts have been given, has been already somewhat characterized in the biographical sketch. It is the opinion of Mr. Arthur Symons that Browning never wrote anything to equal this play in artistic symmetry. The marvelous power of personal influence in its most indirect, unconscious, attenuated form has, for certain, never been more effectively set forth than here. It should be read throughout. And no better preparation for entering completely into its spirit can be found than a paper on the theme from the pen of Dr. W. V. Kelley, entitled "A Study in Dynamics," printed as an editorial in the November, 1895, number of the *Methodist Review*.

For, what are the voices of birds  
 —Ay, and of beasts,—but words, our words,  
 Only so much more sweet?  
 The knowledge of that with my life begun.  
 But I had so near made out the sun,  
 And counted your stars, the seven and one,  
 Like the fingers of my hand:  
 Nay, I could all but understand  
 Wherefore through heaven the white moon ranges;  
 And just when out of her soft fifty changes  
 No unfamiliar face might overlook me—  
 Suddenly God took me.

## WANTING IS—WHAT ?\*

Wanting is—what?  
 Summer redundant,  
 Blueness abundant,  
 —Where is the blot?

Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,  
 —Framework which waits for a picture to frame:  
 What of the leafage, what of the flower?  
 Roses embowering with naught they embower!  
 Come then, complete incompleteness, O comer,  
 Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer!

Breathe but one breath  
 Rose-beauty above,  
 And all that was death  
 Grows life, grows love,  
 Grows love!

## BEN KARSHOOK'S WISDOM. †

## I.

"Would a man 'scape the rod?"  
 Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,  
 "See that he turn to God  
 The day before his death."

\* A prelude to a group of poems called *Jocoseria*, published in 1883. It is an invocation to Love as the one thing requisite to complete every scene, without which all beauty is fatally flawed. It may refer to love in general, or to one particular beloved one, such as the poet's departed wife, whom he never ceased to miss. But the Christian heart will find its most appropriate application to Him, one of whose names is δέρχεσθενος, "the comer," or, the coming one, or, he that cometh. Jesus is given this title in Matt. xi, 3; xxi, 9; xxiii, 39; Luke vii, 19, 20; John xi, 27; xii, 13, and other places. "Sweet prospects, sweet birds, and sweet flowers" lose their sweetness when Jesus no longer is seen, but his presence disperses all gloom, and when He appears everything "grows life, grows love, grows *love*!"

† Written at Rome, April 27, 1854, and printed in an annual called

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

" Ay, could a man inquire  
 When it shall come ! " I say.  
 The Rabbi's eye shoots fire—  
 " Then let him turn to-day ! "

## II.

Quoth a youth Sadducee :  
 " Reader of many rolls,  
 Is it so certain we  
 Have, as they tell us, souls ? "

" Son, there is no reply ! "  
 The Rabbi bit his beard :  
 " Certain, a soul have I—  
 We may have none," he sneered.

Thus Karshook, the Hiram's Hammer,  
 The Right-hand Temple-column,  
 Taught babes in grace their grammar,  
 And struck the simple, solemn.

## SOUL AND BODY.\*

Good, to forgive ;  
 Best, to forget !  
 Living, we fret ;  
 Dying, we live.  
 Fretless and free,  
 Soul, clap thy pinion !  
 Earth have dominion,  
 Body, o'er thee !

Wander at will,  
 Day after day,—  
 Wander away,  
 Wandering still—

---

*The Keepsake*, edited by a friend, for whom Browning made an exception to his almost invariable rule not to appear in periodicals. Karshook is an Hebraic word for the thistle. The reference in the last verse is, of course, to Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings v, 1; vii, 13), so closely connected with the building of the temple, the right-hand column of which was Jachin, or stability (1 Kings vii, 21).

\* This is the prologue to *La Saisiaz*, and has no name. We have given it the above title, which closely describes its contents. It breathes the same lofty faith and confident assurance that we find in Paul's words: " To die is gain " (Phil. i, 21); " We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord " (2 Cor. v, 8). It suggests also the language of the Master: " Be not anxious for your body " (Matt. vi, 25), and " Be not afraid of them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul " (Matt. x, 28). See also 2 Cor. iv, 16.

Soul that canst soar !  
 Body may slumber :  
 Body shall cumber  
 Soul-flight no more.

Waft of soul's wing !  
 What lies above ?  
 Sunshine and Love,  
 Skyblue and Spring !  
 Body hides—where ?  
 Ferns of all feather,  
 Mosses and heather,  
 Yours be the care !

## EPILOGUE.\*

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,  
 When you set your fancies free,  
 Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—  
 Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you love so,  
 —Pity me ?

O to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken !  
 What had I on earth to do  
 With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly ?  
 Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel  
 —Being—who ?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
 Never doubted clouds would break,  
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
 Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time  
 Greet the unseen with a cheer !  
 Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,  
 "Strive and thrive !" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever  
 There as here !"

\* A part of this poem, the Epilogue to *Asolando*, together with the affecting circumstances under which it was composed, have already been given on page 64. It stands at the end of the volume, and was a fitting close to Browning's lifework. Had he known when he wrote these words that they were the last lines of his message to the world, and that he would pass away (in Venice) on the very day that they were given forth (in London), he could scarcely have made them more suitable and characteristic. It has been well said: "All Browning is here. From first to last the message was ever the same; his confidence in the ultimate and eternal triumph of right was uniform throughout. His faith knew no doubting. Against all evil and in all trouble he stood firm." All who seek the "city which hath foundations" may well "greet the unseen with a cheer."

## PROSPICE.\*

Fear death ?—to feel the fog in my throat,  
 The mist in my face,  
 When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
 I am nearing the place,  
 The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
 The post of the foe ;  
 Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
 Yet the strong man must go :  
 For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
 And the barriers fall,  
 Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
 The reward of it all.  
 I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,  
 The best and the last !  
 I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,  
 And bade me creep past.  
 No ! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers  
 The heroes of old,  
 Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears  
 Of pain, darkness and cold.  
 For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
 The black minute's at end,  
 And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,  
 Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
 Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,  
 Then a light, then thy breast,  
 O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,  
 And with God be the rest !

\* "Look Forward." This is a magnificent defiance of death, a glowing and exultant challenge of "the Arch Fear" to battle. The *Saturday Review* well called it "perhaps the grandest of contemporary poems." It was written in the autumn following Mrs. Browning's death, 1861, and the closing lines bear witness to the strength of his feeling. Charles Wesley's hymn, 482, in which occurs the expression "Soul of my soul," referring to Christ, shows what application the Christian heart may easily give it. Note the preponderance of monosyllables all through, especially in the first eight lines and the last four. Compare with this poem his words to Mr. Sharp on death, given on page 33 of this volume. Paul speaks of some as "all their lifetime subject to bondage through fear of death." Browning has been likened to Bunyan's Mr. Greatheart, leader of the pilgrims to the dark river. For sublime combativeness, fearless faith, and undaunted courage these verses can hardly be paralleled. They remind us of the great apostle's triumphant shouts: "O death, where is thy victory ? O death, where is thy sting ?" (1 Cor. xv, 55, R. V. ;) Death is ours (1 Cor. iii, 22); "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. xv, 54); "Christ Jesus, who abolished death" (2 Tim. i, 10).

## THE PATRIOT.\*

It was roses, roses, all the way,  
 With myrtle mixed in my path like mad :  
 The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,  
 The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,  
 A year ago on this very day.

The air broke into a mist with bells,  
 The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.  
 Had I said, " Good folk, mere noise repels—  
   But give me your sun from yonder skies ! "  
 They had answered, " And afterward, what else ? "

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun  
 To give it my loving friends to keep!  
 Naught man could do, have I left undone :  
   And you see my harvest, what I reap  
 This very day, now a year is run.

There's nobody on the house-tops now—  
 Just a palsied few at the windows set ;  
 For the best of the sight is, all allow,  
   At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,  
 By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,  
 A rope cuts both my wrists behind ;  
 And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,  
   For they fling, whoever has a mind,  
 Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

\* This poem was by many supposed to refer to Arnold of Brescia, hanged and burned in 1155 at Rome, where for many years he had been supreme. But Mr. Browning declares that it is wholly imaginary and not historical; "an old story" he fitly calls it in the subtitle. An illustration of the fickle nature of human favor: to-day feted, to-morrow fated; to-day, Hosanna, to-morrow, Crucify. The last verse is rich in suggestion. It is certainly "safer" to put God in our debt than men. In Luke xiv, 12-14, the Master plainly teaches this. If we are "paid by the world" or look to it for payment, shaping our conduct by its standards, we shall have no claim on the recompense divine, nor shall we recognize our paramount obligation to God. "Paid by the world, what do I owe thee?" the question might fitly be phrased. One may "lend unto the Lord" (Prov. xix, 17), not only by pitying the poor, but by laying out time, strength, or cash upon any good cause. "And heaven's long age of bliss shall pay for all his children suffer here."

In the earlier editions the first line of the last stanza read, "Thus I entered Brescia, and thus I go!" and in the second line of the same stanza "such" stood before "triumphs;" in the last line it read "re-quite" instead of "repay."

Thus I entered, and thus I go !  
 In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.  
 " Paid by the world, what dost thou owe  
 Me ? "—God might question ; now instead,  
 'Tis God shall repay : I am safer so.

## THE LOST LEADER.\*

Just for a handful of silver he left us,  
 Just for a riband to stick in his coat—  
 Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,  
 Lost all the others she lets us devote ;  
 They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,  
 So much was theirs who so little allowed :  
 How all our copper had gone for his service !  
 Rags—were they purple, his heart had been proud !  
 We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him,  
 Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,  
 Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,  
 Made him our pattern to live and to die !  
 Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,  
 Burns, Shelley, were with us,—they watch from their graves !  
 He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,  
 —He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves !  
 We shall march prospering,—not through his presence ;  
 Songs may inspirit us,—not from his lyre ;  
 Deeds will be done,—while he boasts his quiescence,  
 Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire :  
 Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,  
 One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,  
 One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels,  
 One wrong more to man, one more insult to God !

\* This poem is deservedly a favorite with all. In a prize contest instituted some years ago by the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to test the comparative popularity of Browning's shorter poems, *The Lost Leader* stood sixth, those above it being in this order : *How They Brought the Good News, Evelyn Hope, Abt Vogler, Saul, and Rabbi Ben Ezra*. *The Pied Piper* came seventh, and *Prosopice* eighth. The *Patriot*, the Epilogue to *Asolando*, *Boy and Angel*, *Caliban*, *A Death in the Desert*, the *Epistle of Karshish*, and *A Grammarian's Funeral*, all of which are given in this volume, also stood high in the list.

Browning freely admitted in after years that the poet Wordsworth was the original "lost leader" whose defection from liberal principles suggested this poem. But its application to him was by no means close, and many others, of course, from time to time, have come within the sweep of its reproach, have grown rigidly conservative as old age has come on although in youth they were radical. Wordsworth opposed both the Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bills.

Life's night begins : let him never come back to us !  
 There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,  
 Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,  
 Never glad confident morning again !  
 Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,  
 Menace our heart ere we master his own ;  
 Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,  
 Pardon'd in heaven, the first by the throne !

## THE TWINS.\*

Grand rough old Martin Luther  
 Bloomed fables—flowers on furze,  
 The better the uncouthier :  
 Do roses stick like burrs ?

A beggar asked an alms  
 One day at an abbey-door,  
 Said Luther ; but, seized with qualms,  
 The Abbot replied, " We're poor !

" Poor, who had plenty once,  
 When gifts fell thick as rain :  
 But they give us naught, for the nonce,  
 And how should we give again ?"

Then the beggar, " See your sins !  
 Of old, unless I err,  
 Ye had brothers for inmates, twins,  
 Date and Dabibur.

" While Date was in good case  
 Dabibur flourished too :  
 For Dabibur's lenient face  
 No wonder if Date rue.

" Would ye retrieve the one ?  
 Try and make plump the other !  
 When Date's penance is done,  
 Dabibur helps his brother.

\* A versified form of a story given in prose by Martin Luther in his "Table Talk"—the talk on Justification (No. 316). He says that there is in Austria a monastery which was in former times very rich, and remained so as long as it was charitable to the poor, but when it ceased giving it became indigent. The first clause of Luke vi, 38, reads, " Give, and it shall be given unto you," which in the Vulgate, or Latin version, reads, "*Date et dabitur vobis.*" This poem was originally published in 1854 in connection with a poem by Mrs. Browning, "A Plea for the Ragged Schools of London," in a volume issued for a bazaar to benefit the "Refuge for Young Destitute Girls."

"Only, beware relapse!"  
 The Abbot hung his head.  
 This beggar might be perhaps  
 An angel, Luther said.

## FEARS AND SCRUPLES.\*

Here's my case. Of old I used to love him,  
 This same unseen friend, before I knew:  
 Dream there was none like him, none above him,—  
 Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?  
 Not his actions famous far and wide?  
 Absent, he would know I vowed him duty;  
 Present, he would find me at his side.

\* This poem, like so many others of similar nature and structure, needs to be read several times before its full value is possessed. In answer to a letter of inquiry addressed to him by Mr. W. G. Kingsland Browning wrote the following in regard to its meaning: "I think that the point I wanted to illustrate was this: Where there is a genuine love of the 'letters' and 'actions' of the invisible 'friend'—however these may be disadvantaged by an inability to meet the objections to their authenticity or historical value urged by 'experts' who assume the privilege of learning over ignorance—it would indeed be a wrong to the wisdom and goodness of the 'friend' if he were supposed capable of overlooking the actual 'love' and only considering the 'ignorance' which, failing to in any degree effect 'love,' is really the highest evidence that 'love' exists. So I *meant*, whether the result be clear or no."

The doubts and difficulties here outlined (1876) still trouble many; the "foolish mouths" of destructive critics and unreasonable skeptics continue to "give pain" to some; but the suggestion of the poet that God is not an "austere man," looking to reap where he has not sown, making demands not founded in kindness and reason, is eminently sensible. The Father will not blame the child who has done the best he could with the light afforded him. He is something higher than man, not lower; "how much more" his mercy and consideration! "Whom having not seen, ye love" (1 Peter i, 8), and are perfectly justified in loving, might be the motto of this poem. It is an answer to the agnostic, and aims to show that we have a right to take comfort in that faith which cannot be solidified into absolute knowledge. We are the better and the happier for believing, even though what we count truth should turn out in the end to be falsehood, and we do well to cling to it in spite of "frost" and "fire."

Pleasant fancy ! for I had but letters,  
 Only knew of actions by hearsay :  
 He himself was busied with my betters ;  
 What of that ? My turn must come some day.

" Some day " proving—no day ! Here's the puzzle.  
 Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain ?  
 He's so busied ! If I could but muzzle  
 People's foolish mouths that give me pain !

" Letters ? " (hear them !) " You a judge of writing ?  
 Ask the experts ! How they shake the head  
 O'er these characters, your friend's inditing—  
 Call them forgery from A to Z !

" Actions ? Where's your certain proof " (they bother)  
 " He, of all you find so great and good,  
 He, he only, claims this, that, the other  
 Action—claimed by men, a multitude ? "

I can simply wish I might refute you,  
 Wish my friend would,—by a word, a wink,—  
 Bid me stop that foolish mouth,—you brute you !  
 He keeps absent,—why, I cannot think.

Never mind ! Though foolishness may flout me,  
 One thing's sure enough : 'tis neither frost,  
 No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me  
 Thanks for truth—though falsehood, gained—though lost.

All my days, I'll go the softlier, sadlier,  
 For that dream's sake ! How forget the thrill  
 Through and through me as I thought " The gladlier  
 Lives my friend because I love him still ! "

Ah, but there's a menace some one utters !  
 " What and if your friend at home plays tricks ?  
 Peep at hide-and-seek behind the shutters ?  
 Mean your eyes should pierce through solid bricks ?

" What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy ?  
 Lay on you the blame that bricks—conceal ?  
 Say, 'At least I saw who did not see me,  
 Does see now, and presently shall feel ? ' "

" Why, that makes your friend a monster ! " say you :  
 " Had his house no window ? At first nod,  
 Would you not have hailed him ? " Hush, I pray you  
 What if this friend happened to be—God ?

## OVER THE SEA OUR GALLEYS WENT.\*

Over the sea our galleys went,  
 With cleaving prows in order brave  
 To a speeding wind and a bounding wave—  
 A gallant armament:  
 Each bark built out of a forest-tree  
 Left leafy and rough as first it grew,  
 And nailed all over the gaping sides,  
 Within and without, with black bull-hides  
 Seethed in fat and suppled in flame,  
 To bear the playful billows' game :  
 So each good ship was rude to see,  
 Rude and bare to the outward view,

\* The best of the four lyrics from *Paracelsus*, who here expresses, under the guise of this parable, his sense of having wasted life, of having failed in his highest aims, and learned to content himself with low ones. He started out with the fixed determination to know ; to make such discoveries as would marvelously benefit his fellow-men ; to find, through untried methods, the grand secret of life. He aspired "to become a star to men forever." "Endued with comprehension and a steadfast will," he said, "I go to prove my soul ; I shall arrive in His good time." But years have now passed. He has not discovered what he sought ; the results have been scanty. And he is somewhat bitter about it. Disappointed, humiliated, hopeless, convinced of his mistake, yet seeing no way now to remedy it, he pours out his soul to his friend Festus, in the tale given above, whose moral, after these hints, it will not be difficult to discern. He calls it

"The sad rhyme of the men who proudly clung  
 To their first fault, and withered in their pride."

He says :

"I had a noble purpose, and the strength  
 To compass it ; but I have stopped half-way,  
 And wrongly given the first fruits of my toil  
 To objects little worthy of the gift.  
 Why linger round them still ? why clench my fault ?  
 Why seek for consolation in defeat,  
 In vain endeavors to derive a beauty  
 From ugliness ? why seek to make the most  
 Of what no power can change, nor strive instead  
 With mighty effort to redeem the past  
 And, gathering up the treasures thus cast down.  
 To hold a steadfast course till I arrive  
 At their fit destination and my own ?"

His dying speech, from which some extracts have been given on a previous page, has many majestic lines and exalted sentiments. Truer,

But each upbore a stately tent  
 Where cedar pales in scented row  
 Kept out the flakes of the dancing brine,  
 And an awning drooped the mast below,  
 In fold on fold of the purple fine,  
 That neither noontide nor starshine  
 Nor moonlight cold which maketh mad,  
 Might pierce the regal tenement.  
 When the sun dawned, O, gay and glad  
 We set the sail and plied the oar ;  
 But when the night-wind blew like breath,  
 For joy of one day's voyage more,  
 We sang together on the wide sea,  
 Like men at peace on a peaceful shore ;  
 Each sail was loosed to the wind so free,  
 Each helm made sure by the twilight star,  
 And in a sleep as calm as death,  
 We, the voyagers from afar,  
 Lay stretched along, each weary crew  
 In a circle round its wondrous tent  
 Whence gleamed soft light and curled rich scent,  
 And with light and perfume, music too :  
 So the stars wheeled round, and the darkness past,  
 And at morn we started beside the mast,  
 And still each ship was sailing fast.

Now, one morn, land appeared—a speck  
 Dim trembling betwixt sea and sky :  
 "Avoid it," cried our pilot, "check  
 The shout, restrain the eager eye !"  
 But the heaving sea was black behind  
 For many a night and many a day,  
 And land, though but a rock, drew nigh ;  
 So, we broke the cedar pales away,  
 Let the purple awning flap in the wind,

healthier, humbler views of life come to him as he draws near eternity. He finds out at last the value of that love which he has despised ; finds

"That worldly things are utter vanity,  
 That man is made for weakness, and should wait  
 In patient ignorance, till God appoint.  
 'Tis fruitless for mankind  
 To pet themselves with what concerns them not :  
 They are no use that way : they should lie down  
 Content as God has made them, nor go mad  
 In thriveless cares to better what is ill."

"Seest thou great things for thyself ? seek them not" (Jer. xlvi, 5).  
 "Except ye . . . become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii, 3).

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

And a statue bright was on every deck !  
 We shouted, every man of us,  
 And steered right into the harbor thus,  
 With pomp and paean glorious.

A hundred shapes of lucid stone !  
 All day we built its shrine for each,  
 A shrine of rock for every one,  
 Nor paused till in the westering sun  
 We sat together on the beach  
 To sing because our task was done.  
 When lo ! what shouts and merry songs !  
 What laughter all the distance stirs !  
 A loaded raft with happy throngs  
 Of gentle islanders !  
 "Our isles are just at hand," they cried,  
 "Like cloudlets faint in even sleeping.  
 Our temple-gates are opened wide,  
 Our olive-groves thick shade are keeping  
 For these majestic forms"—they cried.  
 O, then we awoke with sudden start  
 From our deep dream, and knew, too late,  
 How bare the rock, how desolate,  
 Which had received our precious freight :  
 Yet we called out—"Depart !  
 Our gifts, once given, must here abide.  
 Our work is done ; we have no heart  
 To mar our work,"—we cried.

## INSTANS TYRANNUS.\*

## I.

Of the million or two, more or less,  
 I rule and possess,  
 One man, for some cause undefined,  
 Was least to my mind.

\* This title is taken from Horace's "Ode to the Just Man" (iii, 3, 1).  
 The lines are these :

Justum et tenacem propositi virum,  
 Non civium ardor prava jubentium,  
 Non vultus instantis tyranni.

The meaning of which is, The just man, firm to his purpose, is not to be shaken from his fixed resolve by the fury of the mob laying upon him their impious behests, nor by the frown of the threatening tyrant. It strongly portrays the power of prayer, and the force of conscience even in those who have long indulged their passions. It hints at the absolute safety of God's people. One with the Almighty is a majority. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. We are never without a friend when God is our friend, and just when the foe of the righteous thinks

## II.

I struck him, he grovelled of course—  
 For, what was his force ?  
 I pinned him to earth with my weight  
 And persistence of hate :  
 And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,  
 As his lot might be worse.

## III.

" Were the object less mean, would he stand  
 At the swing of my hand !  
 For obscurity helps him and blots  
 The hole where he squats."  
 So, I set my five wits on the stretch  
 To inveigle the wretch.  
 All in vain ! Gold and jewels I threw,  
 Still he couched there perdue ;  
 I tempted his blood and his flesh,  
 Hid in roses my mesh,  
 Choicest cates and the flagon's best spilth :  
 Still he kept to his filth.

## IV.

Had he kith now or kin, were access  
 To his heart, did I press :  
 Just a son or a mother to seize !  
 No such booty as these.  
 Were it simply a friend to pursue  
 'Mid my million or two,  
 Who could pay me in person or pelf  
 What he owes me himself !  
 No : I could not but smile through my chafe :  
 For the fellow lay safe  
 As his mates do, the midge and the nit,  
 —Through minuteness, to wit.

## V.

Then a humor more great took its place  
 At the thought of his face,  
 The droop, the low cares of the mouth,  
 The trouble uncouth

his plans are to eventuate in complete success a divine voice forbids further proceedings. "Not a hair of your head shall perish." This scene, though imaginary, has had its counterpart in many an age of persecution. The Rev. W. J. Dawson calls this poem the noblest example of Browning's expression of the doctrines of prayer and providence. He says, "It is a sort of magnificent version of the familiar hymn lines,

"Strong to deliver and good to redeem  
 The weakest believer who trusts upon him."

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

'Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain  
 To put out of its pain.  
 And, " no ! " I admonished myself,  
 " Is one mocked by an elf,  
 Is one baffled by toad or by rat ?  
 The gravamen's in that !  
 How the lion, who crouches to suit  
 His back to my foot,  
 Would admire that I stand in debate !  
 But the small turns the great  
 If it vexes you,—that is the thing !  
 Toad or rat vex the king ?  
 Though I waste half my realm to unearth  
 Toad or rat, 'tis well worth !"

## VI.

So, I soberly laid my last plan  
 To extinguish the man.  
 Round his creep-hole, with never a break,  
 Ran my fires for his sake ;  
 Over-head, did my thunder combine  
 With my underground mine :  
 Till I looked from my labor content  
 To enjoy the event.

## VII.

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end ?  
 Did I say " without friend "?  
 Say rather, from marge to blue marge  
 The whole sky grew his targe  
 With the sun's self for visible boss,  
 While an Arm ran across  
 Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast  
 Where the wretch was safe prest !  
 Do you see ? Just my vengeance complete,  
 The man sprang to his feet,  
 Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed !  
 —So, *I* was afraid !

## JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION.\*

There's heaven above, and night by night  
 I look right through its gorgeous roof ;  
 No suns and moons though e'er so bright  
 Avail to stop me ; splendor-proof  
 I keep the broods of stars aloof :

\* This was first published in 1836 in *The Monthly Repository*, edited by the poet's early and steadfast friend, the Rev. William J. Fox. John Agricola (see cyclopedias), one of the foremost of the German reformers, born at Eisleben, April 20, 1492, dying at Berlin, September 22, 1566, is considered to be the founder of the sect of Antinomians, who reject the

For I intend to get to God,  
 For 'tis to God I speed so fast,  
 For in God's breast, my own abode,  
     Those shoals of dazzling glory, passed,  
     I lay my spirit down at last.  
 I lie where I have always lain,  
     God smiles as he has always smiled ;  
 Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,  
     Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled  
     The heavens, God thought on me his child ;  
 Ordained a life for me, arrayed  
     Its circumstances every one  
 To the minutest ; ay, God said  
     This head this hand should rest upon  
     Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun.  
 And having thus created me,  
     Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,  
 Guiltless forever, like a tree  
     That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know  
     The law by which it prospers so :  
 But sure that thought and word and deed  
     All go to swell his love for me,  
 Me, made because that love had need  
     Of something irreversibly  
     Pledged solely its content to be.  
 Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,  
     No poison-gourd foredoomed to stoop !  
 I have God's warrant, could I blend  
     All hideous sins, as in a cup,  
     To drink the mingled venoms up ;  
 Secure my nature will convert  
     The draught to blossoming gladness fast :  
 While sweet dews turn to the gourd's hurt,  
     And bloat, and while they bloat it, blast,  
     As from the first its lot was cast.  
 For as I lie, smiled on, full-fed  
     By unexhausted power to bless,  
 I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,  
     And those its waves of flame oppress,  
     Swarming in ghastly wretchedness;  
 Whose life on earth aspired to be  
     One altar-smoke, so pure !—to win

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moral law as not binding on Christians, and declare that the believer cannot sin, no matter what he does, since by faith he is made one with Christ and stands completely righteous in him. The poem has a special interest for followers of Wesley and Fletcher, who battled so strenuously against the extremely rigid Calvinistic views of predestination which lead so easily into Antinomianism. The impious teaching so unsparingly exposed in these scorching lines still lingers among some hyper-Calvinists, and its naked hideousness needs occasionally to be exhibited.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

If not love like God's love for me,  
 At least to keep his anger in ;  
 And all their striving turned to sin.  
 Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white  
 With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,  
 The martyr, the wan acolyte,  
 The incense-swinging child,—undone  
 Before God fashioned star or sun !  
 God, whom I praise ; how could I praise,  
 If such as I might understand,  
 Make out and reckon on his ways,  
 And bargain for his love, and stand,  
 Paying a price, at his right hand ?

## THE BOY AND THE ANGEL.\*

Morning, evening, noon and night,  
 "Praise God !" sang Theocrate.

Then to his poor trade he turned,  
 Whereby the daily meal was earned.

Hard he labored, long and well ;  
 O'er his work the boy's curls fell.

But ever, at each period,  
 He stopped and sang, " Praise God ! "

Then back again his curls he threw,  
 And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, " Well done ;  
 I doubt not thou art heard, my son :

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\* The story is simple ; the moral is deep. It is a sermon on contentment, and might have for its text, " I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content " (Phil. iv, 11) ; or, " Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called " (1 Cor. vii, 20) ; or, " The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee . . . there should be no schism in the body " (1 Cor. xii, 21, 25). The " great way " of praise is no more acceptable to God or needful than the small way. " All service ranks the same with God ; there is no last nor first," no small nor great, nothing common or unclean. To do the will divine in the work lying nearest to us, to praise him in our daily task, however humble, this is better than to long for some place that bulks bigger in the gaze of men. We each have a work that no other can do. Even Gabriel, whose praise was flawless, with no doubt or fear, could not precisely fill the place of " that little human praise " which Theocrate sent up. The silencing of that one weak voice had marred " creation's chorus." When, in the great

" As well as if thy voice to-day  
Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

" This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome  
Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, " Would God that I  
Might praise him that great way, and die!"

Night passed, day shone, ✓  
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,  
A thousand years are but a day.

God said in heaven, " Nor day nor night  
Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,  
Spread his wings and sank to earth ;

Entered, in flesh, the empty cell,  
Lived there, and played the craftsman well ;

And morning, evening, noon and night,  
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew :  
The man put off the stripling's hue :

The man matured and fell away  
Into the season of decay :

And ever o'er the trade he bent,  
And ever lived on earth content.

orchestra, the little piccolo on one occasion at rehearsal did not do its full duty the famous bandmaster, Sir Michael Costa, stopped everything, it is said, till the deficiency was corrected. So God.

" No service in itself is small,  
None great though earth it fill,  
But that is small which seeks its own,  
That great which seeks God's will.

" Then hold my hand, most gracious Lord,  
Guide all my goings still,  
And let it be my life's one aim  
To know and do thy will."

*The Boy and the Angel* was first published in *Hood's Magazine*, August, 1844. It was rewritten, with five new couplets, in 1845, and a fresh verse, the final one, was added in 1868.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

(He did God's will ; to him, all one  
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, "A praise is in mine ear ;  
There is no doubt in it, no fear :

"So sing old worlds, and so  
New worlds that from my footstool go.

"Clearer loves sound other ways :  
I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell  
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'Twas Easter Day : he flew to Rome,  
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by  
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,  
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite :

And all his past career  
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,  
Till on his life the sickness weighed ;

And in his cell, when death drew near,  
An angel in a dream brought cheer :

And rising from the sickness drear,  
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,  
And on his sight the angel burned.

"I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell,  
And set thee here ; I did not well.

"Vainly I left my angel-sphere,  
Vain was thy dream of many a year.

"Thy voice's praise seemed weak ; it dropped—  
Creation's chorus stopped !

"Go back and praise again  
The early way, while I remain.

"With that weak voice of our disdain,  
Take up creation's pausing strain.

"Back to the cell and poor employ :  
Resume the craftsman and the boy!"

Theocrite grew old at home ;  
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's dome.

One vanished as the other died :  
They sought God side by side.

#### AMPHIBIAN.\*

The fancy I had to-day,  
Fancy which turned a fear !  
I swam far out in the bay,  
Since waves laughed warm and clear,

I lay and looked at the sun,  
The noon-sun looked at me :  
Between us two, no one  
Live creature, that I could see.

Yes ! There came floating by  
Me, who lay floating too,  
Such a strange butterfly !  
Creature as dear as new :

Because the membraned wings  
So wonderful, so wide,  
So sun-suffused, were things  
Like soul and naught beside.

\* Man is, indeed, amphibious—having a double life, a mixed nature, two sets of faculties, weaponed for two elements, connected with two ranks of being. In other words, he is composed of flesh and spirit, as Scripture declares and experience confirms; a spirit which is at least sometimes ready, a flesh which is usually weak; a spirit whose element is heaven, a flesh which is of the earth, earthly. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal. v, 17). There is a "mind of the flesh" and a "mind of the spirit" (Rom. viii, 6, R. V.).

In the poetic fancy outlined above, the floating butterfly, enjoying its airy freedom, naturally suggests the soul, of which from of old it has been a symbol (*psyche*). The watery sphere, "exempt from worldly noise and dust," is taken to represent the sphere of poetry, "which overbrims with passion and thought" and does, in a way, emancipate those who swim therein, giving them a foretaste of heaven—that realm where poetic dreams shall find fulfillment. We cling to earth. We do not wish "the wings unfurled" just yet, but we find a sort of substitute in poetry, an element where flesh can disport as spirits do in the realm above. Yet even this high contemplation tires us if too much indulged,

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

A handbreadth over-head !

All of the sea my own,  
It owned the sky instead;  
Both of us were alone.

*man is  
alone with  
soul in life*

I never shall join its flight,  
For, naught buoys flesh in air.  
If it touch the sea—good night!  
Death sure and swift waits there.

Can the insect feel the better  
For watching the uncouth play  
Of limbs that slip the fetter,  
Pretend as they were not clay?

Undoubtedly I rejoice  
That the air comports so well  
With a creature which had the choice  
Of the land once. Who can tell?

What if a certain soul  
Which early slipped its sheath,  
And has for its home the whole  
Of heaven, thus look beneath,

Thus watch one who, in the world,  
Both lives and likes life's way,  
Nor wishes the wings unfurled  
That sleep in the worm, they say?

---

and we are not sorry to betake ourselves to the safe, solid land of material fact and steadfast prose. The imaginings of poetry are only a mimicking of the flight of the soul into the heavenly regions, even as the swimmer floating in the bay mimics the floating of the butterfly or bird; but the mimic flight is not to be scorned, though it may be pitied by those who have attained the higher existence. Browning's ideal man may, perhaps, be said to be one in whom the material and the spiritual lives are in complete accord and mutual subservience, and who finds in poetry a sort of compensation and preparation for the loftier flight which is to follow later. The "certain soul" (in the ninth stanza), referred to again as "she" in the last stanza, is, very likely, an allusion to Mrs. Browning, who slipped away from her lover eleven years before this, and was never out of his thought when he wrote of the future. This poem will suggest one of Mrs. Gatty's beautiful parables from nature, entitled "Not Lost, but Gone Before," wherein the image of the dragon fly in the air and the grub in the water is laid hold of to illustrate the emancipation of spirit from flesh at death and the impossibility of its communicating, from out the new element to which it has become adapted, with its old friends below.

But sometimes when the weather  
Is blue, and warm waves tempt  
To free one's self of tether,  
And try a life exempt

From worldly noise and dust,  
In the sphere which overbrims  
With passion and thought,—why, just  
Unable to fly, one swims !

By passion and thought upborne,  
One smiles to one's self—“They fare  
Scarce better, they need not scorn  
Our sea, who live in the air !”

Emancipate through passion  
And thought, with sea for sky,  
We substitute, in a fashion,  
For heaven—poetry :

Which sea, to all intent,  
Gives flesh such noon-disport  
As a finer element  
Affords the spirit-sort.

Whatever they are, we seem :  
Imagine the thing they know ;  
All deeds they do, we dream ;  
Can heaven be else but so ?

And meantime, yonder streak  
Meets the horizon's verge ;  
That is the land, to seek  
If we tire or dread the surge :

Land the solid and safe—  
To welcome again (confess !)  
When, high and dry, we chafe  
The body, and don the dress.

Does she look, pity, wonder  
At one who mimics flight,  
Swims—heaven above, sea under,  
Yet always earth in sight?

#### A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL.\*

*Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe.*

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,  
Singing together.

- (1) Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes  
Each in its tether

\* This poem will be found well worth study. It has called out high encomiums from those best qualified to judge. Dr. Willm V. Kelley says :

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,  
 Cared-for till cock-crow :  
 Look out if yonder be not day again  
 Rimming the rock-row !  
 That's the appropriate country ; there, man's thought,  
 Rarer, intenser,  
 Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,  
 Chafes in the censer.  
 Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop ;  
 Seek we sepulture  
 On a tall mountain, citied to the top,  
 Crowded with culture !  
 All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels ;  
 Clouds overcome it ;  
 No ! yonder sparkle is the citadel's  
 Circling its summit.  
 Thither our path lies ; wind we up the heights ;  
 Wait ye the warning ?  
 Our low life was the level's and the night's ;  
 He's for the morning.  
 Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,  
 'Ware the beholders !

"It is one of the sublimest, noblest, grandest poems ever written ; enough all alone by itself to prove a great soul. It is more majestic than the Matterhorn."

The poet has well caught the spirit of the time mentioned in the title, and gives us a glimpse at the life of the pioneers of the Renaissance, men like the Scaligers, the Casaubons, Pierre de Maricourt, and Cyriac of Ancona, content to labor without fame or reward so that they mastered what they undertook and extended the boundaries of learning. "Grammarien" had a wider meaning then, and stands for a student in the larger sense, one devoted to letters. The relativity and comparative insignificance of earth life is strongly taught. We must know before we can be ; get truth before gaining real life.

The whole poem is in Browning's own peculiar mode. There are several uncouth rhymes in it, such as "fabric" and "dab brick." The closest attention must be paid to the punctuation, especially to the interrogation points and the parentheses, the latter containing some of the side directions of the leader to his comrades who are helping him carry the body of their master to bury it upon the heights, where one can look out on the morning ; the place for thought, suited to his lofty spirit. The lyrico-dramatic verse, it has been observed, seems especially suited to the march of the bearers.

This poem belongs with *Prosipe, Rabbi Ben Esra, Karshish, Cleon*, and the others which are devoted to giving us the true philosophy of life and its relation to the world to come. It excellently illustrates the

This is our master, famous, calm and dead,  
Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd ! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,  
Safe from the weather !

He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,

Singing together,

He was a man born with thy face and throat,

Lyric Apollo !

- (2) Long he lived nameless : how should Spring take note  
Winter would follow ?

Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone !

Cramped and diminished,

Moaned he, " New measures, other feet anon !

My dance is finished " ?

No, that's the world's way : (keep the mountain-side,  
Make for the city !)

He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride

Over men's pity ;

Left play for work, and grappled with the world

Bent on escaping :

" What's in the scroll," quoth he, " thou keepest furled ?  
Show me their shaping,

Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—

Give !"—So, he gowned him,

- (3) Straight got by heart that book to its last page :  
Learned, we found him.

Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,

Accents uncertain :

" Time to taste life," another would have said,

" Up with the curtain ! "

This man said rather, " Actual life comes next ?

Patience a moment !

words of Mr. Hamilton W. Mabie in the *Andover Review* for August, 1887. He says: "From Browning's standpoint life is explicable only as it is seen in its entirety, death being an incident in its dateless being. Full of undeveloped power, possibility, growth, men are to adjust themselves to the world in which they find themselves by a clear, definite perception of the highest, remotest, spiritual end, and by a consistent and resolute use of all things to bear them forward to that end. It is only as we accept resolutely and fearlessly the order of which we are part that we see clearly the 'far-off, divine event to which the whole creation moves.' The path of highest development, with Browning, is to be sought by that sublime enthusiasm which bears the soul beyond the discipline that is shaping it to a unity and fellowship with the divine will behind it. We are to suffer and bear, not passively, with gentle patience and trust, but actively, with cooperative energy of will and joy of insight into the far-off end."

Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,  
 Still there's the comment.  
 Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,  
 Painful or easy!  
 Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,  
 Aye, nor feel queasy."

- Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,  
 When he had learned it,  
 When he had gathered all books had to give!  
 (4) Sooner, he spurned it.  
 Image the whole, then execute the parts—  
 Fancy the fabric  
 Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,  
 Ere mortar dab brick!

(Here's the town-gate reached : there's the market-place  
 Gaping before us.)  
 Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace  
 (Hearten our chorus !)  
 That before living he'd learn how to live—  
 No end to learning :  
 Earn the means first—God surely will contrive  
 Use for our earning.  
 Others mistrust and say, " But time escapes :  
 Live now or never !"  
 He said, " What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes !  
 Man has Forever !"  
 Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head:  
*Calculus* racked him :  
 Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead :  
*Tussis* attacked him.  
 " Now, master, take a little rest!"—not he!  
 (Caution redoubled,  
 Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)  
 Not a whit troubled,  
 Back to his studies, fresher than at first,  
 Fierce as a dragon  
 He (soul-hydropic with a sacred thirst)  
 Sucked at the flagon.  
 Oh, if we draw a circle premature,  
 Headless of far gain,  
 Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure  
 Bad is our bargain!  
 Was it not great? did not he throw on God,  
 (He loves the burthen)—  
 God's task to make the heavenly period  
 Perfect the earthen?  
 Did not he magnify the mind, show clear  
 Just what it all meant?

- (5) He would not discount life, as fools do here,  
 Paid by installment.  
 He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success  
 Found, or earth's failure:

"Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes!  
Hence with life's pale lure!"

That low man seeks a little thing to do,  
Sees it and does it:  
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,  
Dies ere he knows it.  
That low man goes on adding one to one,  
His hundred's soon hit:  
This high man, aiming at a million,  
Misses an unit.

- (6) That, has the world here—should he need the next,  
Let the world mind him!  
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed  
Seeking shall find him.

So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,  
Ground he at grammar;  
Still, through the rattle, parts of speech were rife:  
While he could stammer

- (7) He settled *Holt's* business—let it be!—  
Properly based *Oun*—  
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,  
Dead from the waist down.

Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:  
Hail to your purleus,  
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,  
Swallows and curlews!  
Here's the top-peak; the multitude below  
Live, for they can, there:  
This man decided not to Live but Know—  
Bury this man there?  
Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,  
Lightnings are loosened,  
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,  
Peace let the dew send!  
Lofty designs must close in like effects:  
Loftily lying,  
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,  
Living and dying.

#### NOTES.

(1) There are several unusual words in the poem which it will be a convenience to the reader to have defined here: *Crofts*, fields; *thorpes*, hamlets; *queasy*, qualmish; *hydroptic*, thirsty; *calculus*, the stone; *tussis*, cough; *overcome*, overhang.

(2) Absorbed in his extended plans for the largest possible life he took little note that the winter of age was close upon him, but he had no thought of surrendering to weakness; he grappled with difficulties in the spirit of Jacob at Peniel, and prevailed.

(3) The book of learning written by the bards and sages he mastered entire, at large cost ; it could not escape him.

(4) He spurned the thought that there could be any true life before he had learned fully how to live and formed his great ideal, into which "the parts" could then be duly fitted.

(5) He discounts life, who, having no trust in God and the future, lives by sight, not faith, and grasps at present joy instead of waiting for "the crown laid up."

(6) "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it ; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose or forfeit his own self?" (Luke ix, 24, 25.) It is a good bargain to throw away "an unit"—this world—and gain "a million"—the next world.

(7) These Greek particles, *Hoti*, *Oun*, and *De*, to which the Grammarian gave his life because, under the circumstances of the time, he felt that to be his calling, may well represent for us still higher things for the accomplishment of which we should disregard all earthly pleasures.

RABBI BEN EZRA.\*

Grow old along with me !  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of like, for which the first was made :  
Our times are in his hand  
Who saith, "A whole I planned,  
Youth shows but half ; trust God : see all, nor be afraid!"

\* This is admitted by all to be one of the very noblest religious poems in the language, deep, weighty, and inspiring beyond, perhaps, any other that Browning wrote. Mr. William Sharp calls it, "The most quintessential of all the distinctively psychical monologues which Browning has written ;" and he adds, "It seems to me that if these two poems only, *Prospice* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, were to survive to the day of Macaulay's New Zealander, the contemporaries of that meditative traveler would have sufficient to enable them to understand the great fame of the poet of dim ancestral days." *Saul*, *Prospice*, and *Rabbi Ben Ezra* are in our opinion the three of Browning's short poems which have taken strongest hold of the religious public. While *Prospice* is a hymn of death, a passionate, exultant war cry of triumph over the last of foes, filled with the impetuous blood of militant manhood, *Rabbi Ben Ezra* is a song of life, and breathes the chastened gravity of wise old age. In *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, it has been remarked, "Browning sang as few have done the worth of life; in *Saul* he sang as no one else has done the joy of life."

It is one of those poems that mold character, and that deserve to be gotten by heart in the fullest sense. It has lines which chant themselves

(1) Not that, amassing flowers,  
 Youth sighed, " Which rose make ours,  
 Which lily leave and then as best recall?"  
 Not that, admiring stars,  
 It yearned, " Nor Jove, nor Mars ;  
 Mine be some figured flame which blends  
 them all ! "

Not for such hopes and fears  
 Annulling youth's brief years,  
 Do I remonstrate : folly wide the mark !  
 Rather I prize the doubt  
 Low kinds exist without,  
 Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

Poor vaunt of life indeed,  
 Were man but formed to feed  
 On joy, to solely seek and find and feast ;  
 Such feasting ended, then  
 As sure an end to men ;  
 Irks care the crop-full bird ? Frets doubt the maw-crammed  
 beast ?

into the soul with a cheer and a comfort that cannot be expressed. It furnishes light in darkness, strength in weakness, hope in gloom. A philosophy of life crystallized into a shape of abiding beauty, a glorification of age, a sublime pæan of victory in which the supremacy of soul over body, of mind over matter, finds enthusiastic yet chastened expression. Written when the author was a little beyond fifty, when the shadows of age had begun to fall upon his pathway, it depicts, in a form which belongs to the highest order of meditative poetry, the true way to grow old gracefully, happily, with buoyant hope and perfect trust. It breathes so magnificent a confidence in God and the future as to dispel all the sadness which so commonly rests upon the closing period of life and is connected with its contemplation. Scripture passages, like " My times are in thy hand " (Psalm xxxi, 15) ; " Be not afraid, only believe " (Mark v, 36) ; " Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful " (John xiv, 27), are not only unmistakably suggested, but practically incorporated in the lines.

The character of the rabbi, who is depicted as addressing some young friend and bidding him survey life from his standpoint, is historical. He was one of the most eminent of the Jewish literati of the Middle Ages (Abraham ben Meir ben Ezra), born at Toledo about 1090, but residing chiefly in Italy and England, and dying in 1168. He was distinguished as philosopher, astronomer, physician, and poet, also as grammarian and commentator. He is best known by a series of commentaries on the books of the Old Testament, which are considered of great value. Mr. A. J.

Rejoice we are allied  
 To that which doth provide  
 And not partake, effect and not receive !  
 A spark disturbs our clod ;  
 (2) Nearer we hold of God  
 Who gives, than of his tribes that take, I must believe.

Then welcome each rebuff  
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
 Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go !  
 Be our joys three-parts pain !  
 Strive, and hold cheap the strain ;  
 Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge the  
 thro'e !

For thence,—a paradox  
 Which comforts while it mocks,—  
 Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail :  
 (3) What I aspired to be,  
 And was not, comforts me :  
 A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

Campbell, who has carefully examined these commentaries, thinks that the distinctive features of the rabbi of the poem were drawn from the real man, and that the philosophy put into the mouth of Ben Ezra was actually that of the original. The essential life of man, he taught, was the life of the soul, wherein we are superior to the lower orders of creation ; even as it is written in Job xxxv, 11, "Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven ?"

Being from the mouth of a Jewish rabbi, we have in the poem, of course, pure Theism, rather than anything distinctively Christian. The climax of the earthly life is represented as coming, not in the middle, when the physical powers are at their best, but at the close, when experience is ripest. It is only in the case of the brute that the "flesh has soul to suit," or body keeps pace with the soul. Our superiority to them is shown by the spiritual gains we can make from material losses. We "welcome each rebuff" that enables the soul to go forward "on its lone way." Life's true success is secured through obstacles. Flesh and soul must be mutually subservient. "The flight of time is but the spinning of the potter's wheel, to which we are as clay. This fleeting circumstance is but the machinery which stamps the soul. And its latest impress is the best, though the base of the cup be adorned with laughing loves, while skull-like images constitute its rim."

It would be well indeed if all Browning's readers learned to grow old along with him, approach the bound of life in the way he did, accepting old age joyously as the vantage ground from which life can best be viewed, and the truth in regard to its struggles fully discerned. His final poems,

What is he but a brute  
 Whose flesh has soul to suit,  
 Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play ?  
 To man, propose this test—  
 Thy body at its best,  
 How far can that project thy soul on its lone way ?

Yet gifts should prove their use :  
 I own the Past profuse  
 Of power each side, perfection every turn :  
 Eyes, ears took in their dole,  
 Brain treasured up the whole ;  
 Should not the heart beat once " How good to live and  
 learn " ?

Not once beat " Praise be thine !  
 I see the whole design,  
 (4) I, who saw power, see now Love perfect too :  
 Perfect I call thy plan :  
 Thanks that I was a man !  
 Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what thou shalt do ! "

For pleasant is this flesh ;  
 Our soul, in its rose-mesh  
 Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest :  
 Would we some prize might hold  
 To match those manifold  
 Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best !

Let us not always say,  
 "Spite of this flesh to-day  
 I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole ! "  
 As the bird wings and sings,  
 Let us cry, " All good things  
 Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul ! "

Therefore I summon age  
 To grant youth's heritage,  
 Life's struggle having so far reached its term :  
 Thence shall I pass, approved  
 A man, for eye removed  
 From the developed brute; a God though in the germ.

*Reverie* and the *Epilogue*, show that the feelings there indicated had not faded when a quarter of a century more had passed and the real close came on.

The poem is sufficiently condensed and has enough of Browningese in it to require some thought to make it clear. We append a few notes, not enough to do away with this necessity, but sufficient, perhaps, for those who will prize all the more that which has made some demands upon their minds.

And I shall thereupon  
Take rest, ere I be gone

- (5) Once more on my adventure brave and new :  
Fearless and unperplexed,  
When I wage battle next,  
What weapons to select, what armor to indu.

Youth ended, I shall try  
My gain or loss thereby ;  
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold :  
And I shall weigh the same,  
Give life its praise or blame :  
Young, all lay in dispute ; I shall know, being old.

For note, when evening shuts,  
A certain moment cuts  
The deed off, calls the glory from the gray :  
A whisper from the west  
Shoots—"Add this to the rest,  
Take it and try its worth : here dies another day."

So, still within this life,  
Though lifted o'er its strife,  
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,  
"This rage was right i' the main,  
That acquiescence vain :  
The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

For more is not reserved  
To man, with soul just nerved  
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:  
Here, work enough to watch  
The Master work, and catch  
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

As it was better, youth  
Should strive, through acts uncouth,  
Toward making, than repose on aught found made :  
So, better, age, exempt  
From strife, should know, than tempt  
Further. Thou waitedst age : wait death nor be afraid !

Enough now, if the Right  
And Good and Infinite  
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,  
With knowledge absolute,  
Subject to no dispute  
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

- (6) Be there, for once and all,  
Severed great minds from small,  
Announced to each his station in the Past !

Was I, the world arraigned,  
Were they, my soul disdained,  
Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

Now, who shall arbitrate?  
Ten men love what I hate,  
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;  
Ten, who in ears and eyes  
Match me: we all surmise,  
They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

Not on the vulgar mass  
Called "work," must sentence pass,  
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;  
O'er which, from level stand,  
The low world laid its hand,  
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

But all, the world's coarse thumb  
And finger failed to plumb,  
So passed in making up the main account;  
All instincts immature,  
All purposes unsure,  
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

Thoughts hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act,  
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;  
All I could never be,  
All, men ignored in me,  
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

(7) Ay, note that Potter's wheel,  
That metaphor! and feel  
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—  
Thou, to whom fools propound,  
When the wine makes its round,  
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

Fool! All that is, at all,  
Lasts ever, past recall;  
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:  
What entered into thee,  
That was, is, and shall be:  
○ Time's wheel runs back or steps: Potter and clay endure.

He fixed thee 'mid this dance  
Of plastic circumstance,  
This Present, thou, forsooth, would fain arrest:  
Machinery just meant  
To give thy soul its bent,  
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

What though the earlier grooves,  
 Which ran the laughing loves  
 Around thy base, no longer pause and press ?  
 What though, about thy rim,  
 Skull-things in order grim  
 Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress ?

Look not thou down but up !  
 To uses of a cup,  
 The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,  
 The new wine's foaming flow,  
 The Master's lips aglow !  
 Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou with  
 earth's wheel ?

But I need, now as then,  
 Thee, God, who mouldest men ;  
 And since, not even while the whirl was worst,  
 Did I—to the wheel of life  
 With shapes and colors rise,

(8) Bound dizzily—mistake my end, to slake thy thirst :  
 So, take and use thy work :  
 Amend what flaws may lurk,  
 What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim !  
 My times be in thy hand !  
 Perfect the cup as planned !  
 Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same !

## NOTES.

(1) At the beginning of this stanza supply from the next, "I remonstrate." The thought is, let youth, if it will, sigh for the impossible, be perplexed in its choices, blunder in its decisions. It would be foolish to blame it for what, after all, is only a sign of its high origin. There is in it "a spark" of the divine which makes it aspire and doubt, even to the extent of almost "annulling"—that is, obliterating or abbreviating some of its brief years ineffective, ill-directed struggles. Man is above the beast, who has no thought higher than a full stomach.

(2) "Nearer hold"—that is, have nearer relationship (Heb. ii, 16). "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx, 35).

(3) A favorite thought of the poet's. In *Saul* he says, "'Tis not what man does which exalts him, but what man would do;" and in *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*: "Aspire, break bounds! Success is naught, endeavor's all." The duty is ours, the result is God's.

(4) One of the most frequently recurring notes in Browning's song, found in *Paracelsus* at the beginning, and in *Reverie* at the ending, of his career—the unity of power, or knowledge, and love; nothing perfect without the combination of the two, and the perfection of one

implying the perfection of the other. "Thanks that I was a man!" is also a thoroughly characteristic exclamation of this healthy, virile optimist. He finds it "good to live and learn," finds a help even in the flesh, albeit it sometimes pulls the spirit down.

(5) A cheerful term for death, in full harmony with his latest expression about it, "Greet the unseen with a cheer." So here, a few stanzas further down, "Wait death nor be afraid."

(6) We know "here" "with knowledge absolute" that there is such a thing as "the Right and Good," but only "there" can the long dispute be determined as to just what among practical actions was right. "Now" men blunder in their attempts at judgment in that they only see the surface.

By "knowledge absolute," in the previous stanza, that soul knowledge seems to be meant which is reached through direct assimilation by the soul of the hidden principles of things; as distinguished from intellectual knowledge, which is based on the phenomenal, and must be more or less subject to dispute.

(7) The potter's wheel. A familiar Scripture figure (*Isa. xxix, 16; lxiv, 8; Jer. xviii, 2; Rom. ix, 21*).

(8) Man's chief end is to give God enjoyment forever, and thus fulfill the "uses of a cup." When the spinning wheel of time has brought the cup into its consummate shape it will be no more needed; but till then let "the pang," "the throe," "the strain," be welcomed. "Perfect the cup as planned."

The last nine stanzas of *Holy-Cross Day* have Rabbi Ben Ezra's "Song of Death"—his supposed death-bed utterances—on a wholly different topic from the poem above. It is a pathetic and solemn invocation to the justice and the sympathy of Christ, in view of the sufferings of his Jewish kinsmen and the barbarities of his Christian followers.

#### SAUL.\*

##### I.

Said Abner, "At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,  
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it, and did kiss his  
cheek.

And he: "Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance sent,  
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent

\* By all judges accounted one of the best and grandest poems ever written, worthy to be embraced in any list, however select. It is frequently put first of all that Browning wrote, as uniting every poetic quality in perfect fusion. The joy of life, the might of love, the beauty of nature, the greatness of man, are all sung in harmonious numbers and set forth in strains of true sublimity. "A Messianic oratorio in words."

Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet,  
 Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.  
 For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,  
 Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of praise,  
 To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their strife,  
 And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon life.

## II.

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved ! God's child with his dew  
 On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue  
 Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no wild heat  
 Were now raging to torture the desert ! "

## III.

Then I, as was meet,  
 Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet,  
 And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent was unlooped ;  
 I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped ;  
 Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered and gone,  
 That extends to the second inclosure, I groped my way on  
 Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once more I prayed,  
 And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid  
 But spoke, "Here is David, thy servant !" And no voice replied.  
 At the first I saw naught but the blackness : but soon I descried  
 A something more black than the blackness—the vast, the upright  
 Main prop which sustains the pavilion : and slow into sight  
 Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.  
 Then a sunbeam, that burst through the tent-roof, shewed Saul.

Mr. Kingsland calls it " incomparably the finest lyric in modern poetry, brimful of music."

The poem is founded on the passage, 1 Sam. xvi, 14-23, ending with the verse, "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand : so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." It has been thought that the conception was suggested to Browning by a remark in Heber's *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (vol. ii, p. 197), reading as follows: "Take David in the presence of Saul. More than one poet has availed himself of the beauty of this situation, but no one, to my knowledge, has yet stolen the harp of David and produced a poem such even as Dryden's Ode, in the composition of Handel, where Timotheus plays before Alexander." The first nine sections of the composition were published in 1845, but ten years later, when the poet had grown mature in mind and spirit, and his vision of the consolation of God had become greatly expanded, he added ten other sections which completely transformed it.

It has been well said that to thoroughly comprehend this poem "we must put ourselves at the standpoint of the age before Christ came. We

## IV.

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out wide  
On the great cross-support in the center, that goes to each side ;  
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs

- (1) And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,  
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come  
With the spring-time,—so agonized Saul, dear and stark, blind and dumb.

## V.

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine round its  
chords  
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide—those sunbeams like  
swords !

- (2) And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after one,  
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.  
They are white and untormented by the bushes, for lo, they have fed  
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed ;  
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star  
Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and so far !

## VI.

—Then the tune for which quails on the corn-land will each leave  
his mate  
To fly after the player ; then, what makes the crickets elate  
Till for boldness they fight one another ; and then, what has  
weight

- (3) To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand house—  
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird and half mouse !  
God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our fear,  
To give sign, we and they are his children, one family here.

have never known what it is to be without Christ. Saul had no Christ. He had gone wrong, he was helpless, and there was no one with love like man's and power like God's to set him right. He was at war with God, and mad with the misery of his unnatural feelings, and there was no one to make peace. David yearns to bring recreating comfort. He seeks after the right message. Only God himself is sufficient for Saul, and the humanizing of God in Christ, that he may reach down to man and lift him up into the atmosphere of his own presence, is the assurance which he attains, the supreme conclusion reached by a reason saturated by faith and love."

We have, then, a strong lesson as to man's need of Christ. Also we are taught that it is the duty of every man to keep at its fullest pitch, for the good of his fellows, that sympathetic power which enables him at any moment to bring a kind of mesmeric force to bear upon them, that they may thus be aided to expel some of the devils of the world and the flesh. David, pitying Saul's mental derangement and delirium (ascribed, as was customary in ancient times, to evil spirits), engages in an

## VII.

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their wine-song, when  
 hand  
 Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and great hearts  
 expand  
 And grow one in the sense of this world's life.—And then, the last  
 song  
 When the dead man is praised on his journey—"Bear, bear him  
 along,  
 With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are balm seeds  
 not here  
 To console us? The land has none left such as he on the bier.  
 O, would we might keep thee, my brother!"—And then, the glad  
 chaunt  
 Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens, next, she whom we  
 vaunt  
 As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.—And then, the great  
 march  
 Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress an arch  
 Naught can break; who shall harm them, our friends? Then, the  
 chorus intoned  
 As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned.  
 (4) But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned.

## VIII.

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened apart;  
 And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and sparkles 'gan  
 dart  
 From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once with a start,  
 All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart.  
 So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there erect.  
 And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,  
 As I sang:—

intellectual battle more severe than that with Goliath, a setting of brain  
 to brain, the healthful to the diseased. The moving force in the struggle  
 was close akin to what we call the spirit of prayer—a quality which  
 brings one into immediate contact with God and gives him something of  
 a divine power.

David, it has been noted, presents three series of motives to Saul, each  
 series rising higher than the preceding. First comes the tunes played  
 to the brutes—the sheep, the quails, the crickets, the jerboa—appealing  
 to Saul's animal nature, bringing him into harmony with the lower forms  
 of healthy life; for there is a bond of sympathy between ourselves and  
 these creatures of our Father which is not to be overlooked. Secondly  
 come the help-tunes of the great epochs in human life—reapers, burial,  
 marriage, march, worship. Saul is stirred a little by some faint memories  
 of these things, they have more power to move him than the pastoral associations, but still he is in the grip of the demon. So, thirdly,

## IX.

- (5) "O, our manhood's prime vigor ! No spirit feels waste,  
 Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.  
 O, the wild joys of living ! the leaping from rock up to rock,  
 The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock  
 Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,  
 And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.  
 And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,  
 And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,  
 And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell  
 That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well,  
 How good is man's life, the mere living ! how fit to employ  
 All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!  
 Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword thou  
 didst guard  
 When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious reward ?  
 Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as men sung  
 The low song of the nearly-departed, and hear her faint tongue  
 Joining in while it could to the witness, ' Let one more attest,  
 (6) I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime, and all was for  
 best' ?  
 Then they sung through their tears in strong triumph, not much,  
 but the rest.  
 And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working whence  
 grew  
 Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the spirit strained  
 true :  
 And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood of wonder and hope,  
 Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the eye's scope,—  
 Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch ; a people is thine ;  
 And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head combine !

David proceeds to songs of human aspiration—the bliss and worthiness of life, the fame that crowns ambition, the praise of unborn generations, the next world's rewards and repose. This brings solace; Saul is recalled to life, is a king again. But something yet seems lacking. David longs to impart to the monarch a greater blessing, and under the stress of this deep desire he becomes filled with the spirit of prophecy, and there is revealed to him a vision of God as the incarnation of love in Christ. What David himself has yearned to accomplish, even with utmost self-sacrifice, but is unable through weakness, that and much more will God the Almighty do, for human nature in its power of love would otherwise outstrip the divine. Thus the divine-human hand throws open the gates of the new life, and the Christ stands upon the earth.

President Strong writes : " David rises in spirit as he sings ; in love he takes to himself Saul's sorrow, and as he does so a Spirit greater than his own takes possession of the singer ; through his own love for the monarch he is lifted up to understand something of the great love of God ; his human sympathy becomes the vehicle of prophecy ; in God

On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and rage (like the  
throe  
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labor and lets the gold go)  
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning them,—  
all  
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—King Saul ! ”

## X.

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,—heart, hand, harp and voice,  
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding rejoice  
Saul's fame in the light it was made for—as when, dare I say,  
The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains through its array,  
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot—“Saul ! ” cried I, and stopped,  
And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul, who hung  
proped  
By the tent's cross-support in the center, was struck by his name.  
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes right to the aim,  
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that held (he alone,  
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a broad bust of  
stone  
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate—leaves grasp of the  
sheet ?  
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down to his feet,  
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet, your mountain of  
old,  
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages untold—  
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each furrow and scar  
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest—all hail, there they  
are !  
—Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold the nest  
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the green on its crest  
For their food in the ardors of summer. One long shudder thrilled  
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and was stilled  
At the King's self left standing before me, released and aware.  
What was gone, what remained? All to traverse 'twixt hope and  
despair,  
Death was past, life not come: so he waited. Awhile his right hand  
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant forthwith to remand  
To their place what new objects should enter: 'twas Saul as before.  
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was hurt any more  
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch from the shore,

---

himself he sees the desire to reveal himself in human form to men. Is there any other poem that so fully and truly expresses the method of divine inspiration? Here is a using of human faculties and powers, of human heart and tongue, yet an elevation of all these to heights of understanding and expression which unaided humanity is powerless to reach. The supernatural uses the natural as its basis and starting point, as its medium and vehicle; but it transcends the natural, opening to it the far reaches of prophetic vision, and attuning it to the melody of a heavenly song.”

At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean—a sun's slow decline  
 Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap and entwine  
 Base with base to knit strength more intently: so, arm folded arm  
 O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

## XI.

What spell or what charm,  
 (For awhile there was trouble within me,) what next should I urge  
 To sustain him where song had restored him?—Song filled to the  
 verge  
 His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it yields  
 Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: beyond, on what  
 fields,  
 Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten the eye  
 And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the cup they put  
 by?  
 He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets me praise life,  
 Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

## XII.

Then fancies grew rife  
 Which had come long ago on the pasture, when round me the sheep  
 Fed in silence—above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep;  
 And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie  
 'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt the hill and the  
 sky:  
 And I laughed—"Since my days are ordained to be passed with my  
 flocks,  
 Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains and the rocks,  
 Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image the show  
 Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly shall know!  
 Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the courage that gains,  
 And the prudence that keeps what men strive for." And now these  
 old trains  
 Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so, once more the  
 string  
 Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus—

## XIII.

"Yea, my King,"  
 I began—"thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts that spring  
 From the mere mortal life held in common by man and by brute:  
 In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.  
 Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how its stem trembled  
 first  
 Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then safely outburst  
 The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when these too, in  
 turn,  
 Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect: yet more was to  
 learn,  
 E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit. Our dates shall  
 we slight,  
 When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or care for the plight

Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them? Not so!  
 stem and branch  
 Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the palm wine shall  
 stanch

Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine.  
 Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine!  
 By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy  
 More indeed, than at first when unconscious, the life of a boy.  
 Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each deed thou hast  
 done

Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun  
 Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him, though tem-  
 pests efface,

Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere trace  
 The results of his past summer-prime,—so, each ray of thy will,  
 Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill  
 The whole people, the countless, with ardor, till they too give forth  
 A like cheer to their sons, who, in turn, fill the South and the  
 North

With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse in the past!  
 But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last:  
 As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at her height,  
 So with man—so his power and his beauty forever take flight.

(7) No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look forth o'er the  
 years!

Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin with the seer's!  
 Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his tomb—bid arise  
 A gray mountain of marble heaped four-square, till, built to the  
 skies,

Let it mark where the great First King slumbers: whose fame would  
 ye know?

Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record shall go;  
 In great characters cut by the scribe,—Such was Saul, so he did;  
 With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid,—  
 For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there! Which fault to  
 amend,

In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon they shall spend  
 (See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise, and record  
 With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,—the statesman's great  
 word

Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river's a-wave  
 With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when prophet-winds  
 rave:

So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part  
 In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that thou  
 art!"

#### XIV.

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who didst grant me that  
 day,

And before it not seldom has granted thy help to essay,  
 Carry on and complete an adventure,—my shield and my sword  
 In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my  
 word,—

## CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS;

OR NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND.\*

"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself."—Psalm 1, 21.

- (1) [Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,  
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,  
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.  
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,  
And feels about his spine small eft-things course,  
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh :  
And while above his head a pompion-plant,  
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,  
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,  
And now a flower drops with a bee inside,  
And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,—  
He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross  
And recross till they weave a spider-web,  
(Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times,) And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,  
Touching that other, whom his dam called God.  
Because to talk about Him, vexes—ha,  
Could He but know ! and time to vex is now,  
When talk is safer than in winter-time.  
Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep  
In confidence he drudges at their task,  
And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,  
Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech.]

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos !  
'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

\* In order best to enjoy this extraordinary poem one should first read Shakespeare's *Tempest*, from which all the characters are taken. Prospero and Miranda, his daughter, dwelling for a time upon a certain imaginary island, control Ariel, an airy sprite, and Caliban, "a savage and deformed slave," variously described in the play as "a freckled whelp, hog-born," "a monster," "a misshapen knave," "fish," "moon-calf," "demi-devil," the bastard progeny of his "dam," Sycorax, who was a witch. Setebos was the name of the god of the Patagonians, discovered by Magellan, and described in Richard Eden's account of the natives of Patagonia—quite familiar by 1611 to the readers of the *Tempest*—and worshiped by Sycorax and Caliban. (Eden's *History of Travaille* was published in London in 1577.) Browning has taken this queer conception of Shakespeare's—this half man, half brute, a sort of rudimentary human being—and endowed him with a power of introspection almost equal to Hamlet's. What in him could have been at best only vague, semiconscious feelings the poet has elaborated into definite, well-expressed thought. The creation is decidedly unique, and is a fine illustration of grotesque art—the finest in the language. Caliban

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,  
But not the stars ; the stars came otherwise ;  
Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that :  
Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,  
And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease :  
He hated that He cannot change His cold,  
Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish  
That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,  
And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine  
O' the lazy sea her stream thrust far amid,  
A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave ;  
Only, she ever sickened, found repulse  
At the other kind of water, not her life,  
(Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun,)  
Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,  
And in her own bounds buried her despair,  
Hating and loving warmth alike : so He.

'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,  
Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing.  
Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech ;  
Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,  
That floats and feeds ; a certain badger brown  
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye  
By moonlight ; and the pie with the long tongue  
That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,

gives us—in the third person, characteristic of children, or an early phase of language structure—his ideas about God. Wholly from the analogies of his own experience he builds up notion of the Creator. We have the ruminations of an undeveloped mind, influenced by his observations of the capriciousness of nature, his fear of its threatening aspects, his hatred of his master's cruelty to him, and the movings of his own passions. Mr. Huxley has called the poem a truly scientific representation of the development of religious ideas in primitive man. The poet has apprehended and interpreted the crude sensations of this low being, turning his dumb starings and quaint fancies into words. The surprising climax at the close has been especially admired.

Caliban constructs a God impelled by such motives as would influence himself. Spite, or personal discomfort, he conceives to be the main impulse of creation ; punishment is inflicted in caprice, and the most promising attitude toward God is cowering, abject submission, with not too much display of happiness to provoke his notice and wrath. Certain sober theologians in the not very remote past arrived at conclusions as to the nature of the divine Being not greatly superior to Caliban's, and that, too, though they were by no means entirely confined to the light of Nature. It has been suggested that this monster shows signs of having

And says a plain word when she finds her prize,  
 But will not eat the ants ; the ants themselves  
 That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks  
 About their hole—He made all these and more,  
Made all we see, and us, in spite: how else ?  
 He could not, Himself, make a second self  
 To be His mate; as well have made Himself:  
 He would not make what He mislikes or slight,  
 An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains :  
 But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,  
 Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be—  
 Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,  
 Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,  
 Things He admires and mocks too,—that is it.  
 Because, so brave, so better though they be,  
 It nothing skills if He begin to plague.  
 Look now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,  
 Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,  
 Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss,—  
 Then, when froth rises bladdery, drink up all,  
 Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my brain ;  
 Last, throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,  
 And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.  
 Put case, unable to be what I wish,  
 I yet could make a live bird out of clay :  
 Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban  
 Able to fly ?—for, there, see, he hath wings,  
 And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,  
 And there, a sting to do his foes offence,  
 There, and I will that he begin to live,  
 Fly to yon rock-top, nip me off the horns  
 Of grigs high up that make the merry din,

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studied St. Augustine and having been familiar with the works of Calvin, since the latter, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, taught that "God has predestinated some to eternal life, while the rest of mankind are predestinated to condemnation and eternal death." And the Westminster Confession of Faith, still approved by a large denomination, says, "The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsels of his will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious grace."

The poem is a lesson on the dangers of anthropomorphism, a rebuke to the idea of God as it exists in minds of a narrow, unloving type. We have in Caliban a coarse, gross, sensual, brutal, uncontrolled, and every way unpleasant creature, and we see what sort of a God, in his own image and likeness, he is moved to create in his strugglings with the problem of the universe and the character of its Maker. The gods of

Saucy through their veined wings, and mind me not.  
 In which feat, if his leg snapped, brittle clay,  
 And he lay stupid-like,—why, I should laugh ;  
 And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,  
 Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,  
 Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again,—  
 Well, as the chance were, this might take or else  
 Not take my fancy : I might hear his cry,  
 And give the manikin three sound legs for one,  
 Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg,  
 And lessoned he was mine and merely clay.  
 Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme,  
 Drinking the mash, with brain become alive,  
 Making and marring clay at will ? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,  
 Nor kind, nor cruel : He is strong and Lord.  
 'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs  
 That march now from the mountain to the sea ;  
 'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,  
 Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.  
 'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots  
 Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off;  
 'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,  
 And two worms he whose nippers end in red ;  
 As it likes me each time, I do : so He.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main,  
 Placable if His mind and ways were guessed,  
 But rougher than His handiwork, be sure !  
 O, He hath made things worthier than Himself,  
 And enviieth that, so helped, such things do more  
 Than He who made them ! What consoles but this ?  
 That they, unless through Him, do naught at all,  
 And must submit : what other use in things ?  
 'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder-joint  
 That, blown through, gives exact the scream o' the jay  
 When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue :  
 Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay  
 Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt :  
 Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth,  
 "I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,  
 I make the cry my maker cannot make

the heathen are gods of caprice, of malice, of purposeless interference with creatures who are never regarded as the sheep of their pastures, much less as the children of their love, but rather as playthings or slaves. And the God evolved by some Christians has not been wholly free from these weaknesses and failings ; he has assigned eternal destiny to men—“loving not, hating not, just choosing so.” But the time of this darkness has mainly passed, and a truer light now shineth.

With his great round mouth ; he must blow through mine !"  
Would not I smash it with my foot ? So He.

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease ?  
Aha, that is a question ! Ask, for that,  
What knows,—the something over Setebos  
That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,  
Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.  
There may be something quiet o'er His head,  
Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,  
Since both derive from weakness in some way.  
I joy because the quails come ; would not joy  
Could I bring the quails here when I have a mind :  
(2) This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth.  
'Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,  
But never spends much thought nor care that way.  
It may look up, work up,—the worse for those  
It works on ! 'Careth but for Setebos  
The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,  
Who, making Himself feared through what He does,  
Looks up, first, and perceives he cannot soar  
To what is quiet and hath happy life ;  
Next looks down here, and out of very spite  
Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real,  
These good things to match those as hips do grapes.  
'Tis solace making baubles, ay, and sport.  
Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books  
Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle :  
Vexed, 'stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,  
Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words ;  
Has peeled a wand and called it by a name ;  
Weareth at whiles for an enchanter's robe  
The eyed skin of a supple oncelot ;  
And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,  
A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,  
Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,  
And saith she is Miranda and my wife :  
'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane  
He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge ;  
Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,  
Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,  
And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge  
In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban ;  
A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.  
'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,  
Taketh his mirth with make-believes : so He.

- (3) His dam held that the Quiet made all things  
Which Setebos vexed only : 'holds not so.  
Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex.  
Had He meant other, while His hand was in,  
Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,  
Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow,

Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,  
Like an orc's armor? Ay,—so spoil His sport!  
He is the One now: only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.  
Ay, himself loves what does him good; but why?  
'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast  
Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,  
But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate  
Or love, just as it liked him: He hath eyes.  
Also it pleases Setebos to work,  
Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,  
By no means for the love of what is worked.  
'Tasteth, himself, no finer good i' the world  
When all goes right, in this safe summer-time,  
And he wants little, hungers, aches not much,  
Than trying what to do with wit and strength.  
'Falls to make something: 'piled yon pile of turfs,  
And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk,  
And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,  
And set up endwise certain spikes of tree,  
And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,  
Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill.  
No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake;  
'Shall some day knock it down again: so He.

'Saith He is terrible: watch His feats in proof!  
One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.  
He hath a spite against me, that I know,  
Just as He favors Prosper, who knows why?  
So it is, all the same, as well I find.  
'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm  
With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises  
Crawling to lay their eggs here: well, one wave,  
Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,  
Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,  
And licked the whole labor flat: so much for spite.

'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies)  
Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade:  
Often they scatter sparkles: there is force!  
'Dug up a newt He may have envied once  
And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone.  
Please Him and hinder this?—What Prosper does?  
Aha, if He would tell me how! Not He!  
There is the sport: discover how or die!  
All need not die, for of the things o' the isle  
Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees;  
Those at His mercy,—why, they please Him most  
When . . . when . . . well, never try the same way twice!  
Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.  
(4) You must not know His ways, and play Him off,  
Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself:

'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears  
 But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,  
 And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence :  
 'Spareth an urchin that contrariwise,  
 CURLS UP INTO A BALL, pretending death  
 For fright at my approach : the two ways please.  
 But what would move my choler more than this,  
 That neither creature counted on its life  
 To-morrow and next day and all days to come,  
 Saying, forsooth, in the inmost of its heart,  
 " Because he did so yesterday with me,  
 And otherwise with such another brute,  
 So must he do henceforth and always."—Ay ?  
 Would teach the reasoning couple what " must " means !  
 'DOTH AS HE LIKES, or wherefore Lord ? So He.

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,  
 And we shall have to live in fear of Him  
 So long as He lives, keeps His strength : no change,  
 If He have done His best, make no new world  
 To please Him more, so leave off watching this,—  
 If He surprise not even the Quiet's self  
 Some strange day,—or, suppose, grow into it  
 As grubs grow butterflies : else, here we are,  
 And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

- (5) 'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop.  
 His dam held different, that after death  
 He both plagued enemies and feasted friends :  
 Idly ! He doth His worst in this our life,  
 Giving just respite lest we die through pain,  
 Saving last pain for worst,—with which, an end.  
 Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire  
 Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,  
 Vonder two flies, with purple films and pink,  
 Bask on the pompon-bell above : kills both.  
 'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball  
 On head and tail as if to save their lives :  
 Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.

Even so, 'would have Him misconceive, suppose  
 This Caliban strives hard and ails no less,  
 And always, above all else, envies Him ;  
 Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,  
 Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,  
 And never speaks his mind save housed as now :  
 Outside, 'groans, curses. If He caught me here,  
 O'erheard this speech, and asked " What chucklest at ? "  
 'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off,  
 Or of my three kid yearlings burn the best,  
 Or let the toothsome apples rot on tree,  
 Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste :  
 While myself lit a fire, and made a song

And sung it, " *What I hate, be consecrate  
To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate  
For Thee; what see for envy in poor me?*"  
Hoping the while, since evils sometimes mend,  
Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime,  
That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch  
And conquer Setebos, or likelier He  
Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

- (6) [What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once!  
Crickets stop hissing; not a bird—or, yes,  
There scuds His raven that has told Him all!  
It was fool's play, this prattling! Ha! The wind  
Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,  
And fast invading fires begin! White blaze—  
A tree's head snaps—and there, there, there, there, there.  
His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him!  
Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!  
'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,  
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month  
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!]

## NOTES.

(1) Caliban, much exercised by the government of the world and the probable nature of its ruler, has filched an hour from his task in the summer noon, when his master is taking his diligence upon trust, to sprawl full length in the mud of some cave and talk the problem out.

(2) This conception of "the Quiet" above Setebos, indifferent to the affairs of men, out of envy of whose unapproachable majesty and perfected realities Setebos has made this "bauble-world"—even as Caliban, envying Prosper, has contrived to mimic his joys in the lower animal-sphere, tyrannizing over the beasts—is very interesting, clever, and suggestive.

(3) Caliban sets up to be an original thinker; will not accept his mother's theology, but considers that he has quite penetrated the inner motives of the Creator.

(4) There must be no assumption of understanding the ways of God, or reasoning out his processes, no assertion of the slightest independence as though in any sense master of one's own destiny. Browning's early training among Nonconformists of the Calvinistic type had doubtless familiarized him with a good deal of this sort of preaching, whose absurdity he here so elegantly depicts.

(5) This rationalistic Caliban has "progressed" so far beyond his mother's doctrine that he discards the future life, together with all rewards and punishments hereafter—in which he resembles some famous names of modern times.

(6) This suffix, as well as the prefix, in brackets, is the unuttered thought of Caliban, the part between being his outspoken talk. He now suddenly awakes to the idea that he has talked too freely and exposed himself to the vengeance of Setebos. The thunderstorm smites him with terror ; he crouches in abject fear, and promises to do anything to please its sender if he may only escape this time.

## CLEON.\*

"As certain also of your own poets have said."—Acts xvii, 28.

- (1) Cleon the poet (from the sprinkled isles,  
Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,  
And laugh their pride when the light wave lisps "Greece")—
- (2) To Protus in his Tyranny : much health !

They give thy letter to me, even now :  
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.  
The master of thy galley still unlades  
Gift after gift ; they block my court at last  
And pile themselves along its portico  
Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee :  
And one white she-slave from the group dispersed  
Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work  
Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,  
Now covered with this settle-down of doves),  
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest  
Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands  
Commends to me the strainer and the cup  
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence !  
For so shall men remark, in such an act  
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,  
Thy recognition of the use of life ;  
Nor call thy spirit barely adequate

\* The inadequacy of the earthly life to give permanent satisfaction, and the absolute need of a well-grounded hope of immortality, are very effectively set forth in this poem. It depicts the time, at the coming of Christ, when the old paganism was dissolving—passing away—and a sense of the hopelessness of man's best efforts was most acutely felt by the best minds of the pagan world. Philosophy was helpless to give aid, and culture was barren of comfort. Mingled with the dissatisfaction was a vague unrest and expectancy. Mr. Browning has caught the spirit of the time most admirably, and easily carries his reader back to the middle of the first century. A Greek poet, artist, and philosopher, writes to his friend and patron, King Protus, from whom he has just received princely gifts and a letter making certain inquiries connected with the significance of death. One may imagine how different would be the

To help on life in straight ways, broad enough  
 For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.  
 Thou, in the daily building of thy tower,—  
 Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,  
 Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,  
 Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim  
 Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect,—  
 Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake—  
 Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope  
 Of some eventual rest a-top of it,  
 Whence, all the tumult of the building hushed,  
 Thou first of men mightst look out to the East :  
 The vulgar saw thy tower, thou sawest the sun.  
 For this, I promise on thy festival  
 To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,  
 Making this slave narrate thy fortunes, speak  
 Thy great words, and describe thy royal face—  
 Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,  
 Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.  
 It is as thou hast heard : in one short life  
 I, Cleon, have effected all those things  
 Thou wonderfully dost enumerate.  
 That epos on thy hundred plates of gold  
 Is mine,—and also mine the little chant,  
 So sure to rise from every fishing-bark  
 When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their net.

- (3) The image of the sun-god on the phare,  
 Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine ;
- (4) The Poëcile, o'er-storied its whole length,  
 As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.  
 I know the true proportions of a man  
 And woman also, not observed before ;  
 And I have written three books on the soul,  
 Proving absurd all written hitherto,  
 And putting us to ignorance again.
- (5) For music,—why, I have combined the moods,

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answer sent by Paul if Protus's letter had succeeded in reaching him. It is well to remember in reading the poem that Cleon, as has been remarked by Mrs. Orr, while constantly using the word soul in antithesis to body, uses it in its ancient rather than its modern sense—that is, as expressing the sentient, not the spiritual, life; hence he can believe that it is independent of the lower physical powers, and yet will not survive them. Professor Corson says of *Cleon* that it is "one of a group of poems in which Browning shows himself to be the most essentially Christian of living poets." It certainly illustrates many Scripture texts besides the one placed at its head, as we point out in the following notes, and may be serviceably used in sermons.

- Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine ;  
 Thus much the people know and recognize,  
 Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.  
 We of these latter days, with greater mind  
 (6) Than our forerunners, since more composite,  
 Look not so great, beside their simple way,  
 To a judge who only sees one way at once,  
 One mind-point and no other at a time,—  
 Compares the small part of a man of us  
 With some whole man of the heroic age,  
 Great in his way—not ours, nor meant for ours.  
 And ours is greater, had we skill to know :  
 For, what we call this life of men on earth,  
 This sequence of the soul's achievements here  
 Being, as I find much reason to conceive,  
 Intended to be viewed eventually  
 As a great whole, not analyzed to parts,  
 But each part having reference to all,—  
 How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,  
 Endure effacement by another part ?  
 Was the thing done ?—then, what's to do again ?  
 See, in the chequered pavement opposite,  
 Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,  
 And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid—  
 He did not overlay them, superimpose  
 The new upon the old and blot it out,  
 But laid them on a level in his work,  
 Making at last a picture; there it lies.  
 So, first the perfect separate forms were made,  
 The portions of mankind ; and after, so,  
 Occurred the combination of the same.  
 For where had been a progress, otherwise ?  
 Mankind, made up of all the single men,—  
 In such a synthesis the labor ends.  
 Now mark me ! those divine men of old time  
 Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point  
 The outside verge that rounds our faculty ;  
 And where they reached, who can do more than reach ?  
 It takes but little water just to touch  
 At some one point the inside of a sphere,  
 And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the rest  
 In due succession : but the finer air  
 Which not so palpably nor obviously,  
 Though no less universally, can touch  
 The whole circumference of that emptied sphere,  
 Fills it more fully than the water did ;  
 Holds thrice the weight of water in itself  
 Resolved into a subtler element.  
 And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full  
 Up to the visible height—and after, void ;  
 Not knowing air's more hidden properties.  
 And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus  
 To vindicate his purpose in our life :

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?  
 Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,  
 That he or other god descended here  
 And, once for all, showed simultaneously  
 What, in its nature, never can be shown,  
 Piecemeal or in succession ;—showed, I say,  
 The worth both absolute and relative  
 Of all his children from the birth of time,  
 His instruments for all appointed work.  
 I now go on to image,—might we hear  
 The judgment which should give the due to each,  
 Show where the labor lay and where the ease,  
 And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere !  
 This is a dream :—but no dream, let us hope,  
 That years and days, the summers and the springs,  
 Follow each other with unwaning powers.  
 The grapes which dye thy wine are richer far,  
 Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock ;  
 The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe ;  
 The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet ;  
 The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers ;  
 That young and tender crescent-moon, thy slave,  
 Sleeping above her robe as buoyed by clouds,  
 Refines upon the women of my youth.  
 What, and the soul alone deteriorates ?  
 I have not chanted verse like Homer, no—  
 Nor swept string like Terpander, no—nor carved  
 And painted men like Phidias and his friend :  
 I am not great as they are, point by point.  
 But I have entered into sympathy  
 With these four, running these into one soul,  
 Who, separate, ignored each other's art.  
 Say, is it nothing that I know them all ?  
 The wild flower was the larger ; I have dashed  
 Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's  
 Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,  
 And show a better flower if not so large :  
 I stand myself. Refer this to the gods  
 Whose gift alone it is ! which, shall I dare  
 (All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext  
 That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,  
 Discourse of lightly or deprecate ?  
 It might have fallen to another's hand : what then ?  
 I pass too surely : let at least truth stay !

- And next, of what thou followest on to ask.  
 This being with me as I declare, O king,  
 My works, in all these varicolored kinds,  
 So done by me, accepted so by men—  
 Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men's hearts)  
 I must not be accounted to attain  
 (7) The very crown and proper end of life ?  
 Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up,

I face death with success in my right hand :  
 Whether I fear death less than dost thyself  
 The fortunate of men ? " For " (writest thou)  
 " Thou leavest much behind, while I leave naught.  
 Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,  
 The pictures men shall study ; while my life,  
 Complete and whole now in its power and joy,  
 Dies altogether with my brain and arm,  
 Is lost indeed ; since, what survives myself ?  
 The brazen statue to o'erlook my grave,  
 Set on the promontory which I named.  
 And that—some supple courtier of my heir  
 Shall use its robed and sceptered arm, perhaps,  
 To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.  
 I go then : triumph thou, who dost not go ! "

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind.  
 Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse  
 Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,  
 That admiration grows as knowledge grows ?  
 That imperfection means perfection hid,  
 Reserved in part, to grace the after-time ?  
 If, in the morning of philosophy,  
 Ere aught had been recorded, nay perceived,  
 Thou, with the light now in thee, couldst have looked  
 On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird,  
 Ere man, her last, appeared upon the stage—  
 Thou wouldest have seen them perfect, and deduced  
 The perfectness of others yet unseen.  
 Conceding which,—had Zeus then questioned thee,  
 " Shall I go on a step, improve on this,  
 Do more for visible creatures than is done ? "  
 Thou wouldest have answered, " Ay, by making each  
 Grow conscious in himself—by that alone.  
 All's perfect else : the shell sucks fast the rock,  
 The fish strikes through the sea, the snake both swims  
 And slides, forth range the beasts, the birds take flight,  
 Till life's mechanics can no further go—  
 And all this joy in natural life is put  
 Like fire from off thy finger into each,  
 So exquisitely perfect is the same.  
 But 'tis pure fire, and they mere matter are ;  
 It has them, not they it : and so I choose  
 For man, thy last premeditated work  
 (If I might add a glory to the scheme),  
 That a third thing should stand apart from both,  
 A quality arise within his soul,  
 Which, intro-active, made to supervise  
 And feel the force it has, may view itself,  
 And so be happy." Man might live at first  
 The animal life : but is there nothing more ?  
 In due time, let him critically learn  
 How he lives ; and, the more he gets to know

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Of his own life's adaptabilities,  
The more joy-giving will his life become.  
Thus man, who hath this quality, is best.

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said :  
“ Let progress end at once,—man make no step  
Beyond the natural man, the better beast,  
Using his senses, not the sense of sense.”  
— In man there’s failure, only since he left  
The lower and unconscious forms of life.  
We call it an advance, the rendering plain  
Man’s spirit might grow conscious of man’s life,  
And, by new lore so added to the old,  
Take each step higher over the brute’s head.  
This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,  
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,  
Which whole surrounding flats of natural life  
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to ;  
A tower that crowns a country. But alas,  
The soul now climbs it just to perish there !  
For thence we have discovered (tis no dream—  
We know this, which we had not else perceived)  
That there’s a world of capability  
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,  
Inviting us ; and still the soul craves all,  
And still the flesh replies, “ Take no jot more  
Than ere thou climbst the tower to look abroad !  
Nay, so much less as that fatigue has brought  
Deduction to it.” We struggle, fain to enlarge  
Our bounded physical recipiency,  
Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,  
Repair the waste of age and sickness : no,  
It skills not ! life’s inadequate to joy,  
As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take.  
They praise a fountain in my garden here  
Wherein a Naiad sends the water-bow  
Thin from her tube ; she smiles to see it rise.  
What if I told her, it is just a thread  
From that great river which the hills shut up,  
And mock her with my leave to take the same ?  
The artificer has given her one small tube  
Past power to widen or exchange—what boots  
To know she might spout oceans if she could ?  
She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread :  
And so a man can use but a man’s joy  
While he sees God’s. Is it for Zeus to boast,  
“ See, man, how happy I live, and despair—  
That I may be still happier—for thy use ! ”  
If this were so, we could not thank our lord,  
As hearts beat on to doing ; ‘tis not so—  
Malice it is not. Is it carelessness ?  
Still, no. If care—where is the sign ? I ask,  
And get no answer, and agree in sum,

O king, with thy profound discouragement,  
Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.

- (8) Most progress is most failure : thou sayest well.

The last point now :—thou dost except a case—  
Holding joy not impossible to one  
With artist-gifts—to such a man as I  
Who leave behind me living works indeed ;  
For, such a poem, such a painting lives.  
What ? dost thou verily trip upon a word,  
Confound the accurate view of what joy is  
(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine)  
With feeling joy? confound the knowing how  
And showing how to live (my faculty)  
With actually living?—Otherwise  
Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king?  
Because in my great epos I display  
How divers men young, strong, fair, wise, can act—  
Is this as though I acted ? if I paint,  
Carve the young Phœbus, am I therefore young ?  
Methinks I'm older that I bowed myself  
The many years of pain that taught me art !  
Indeed, to know is something, and to prove  
How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more :  
But, knowing naught, to enjoy is something too.  
Yon rower, with the moulded muscles there,  
Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I.  
I can write love-odes : thy fair slave's an ode.  
I get to sing of love, when grown too gray  
For being beloved : she turns to that young man,  
The muscles all a-ripple on his back.  
I know the joy of kingship: well, thou art king !

“ But,” sayest thou—(and I marvel, I repeat,  
To find thee trip on such a mere word) “ what  
Thou writest, paintest, stays ; that does not die :  
Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,  
And Aeschylus, because we read his plays ! ”  
Why, if they live still, let them come and take  
Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup,  
Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive ?  
Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,  
In this, that every day my sense of joy  
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified  
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen ;  
While every day my hairs fall more and more,  
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase—  
The horror quickening still from year to year,  
The consummation coming past escape,  
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—  
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,  
Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,  
Alive still, in the praise of such as thou,

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,  
 The man who loved his life so over-much,  
 (9) Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,  
 I dare at times imagine to my need  
 Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,  
 Unlimited in capability  
 For joy, as this is in desire for joy,  
 —To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us :  
 That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait  
 On purpose to make prized the life at large—  
 Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,  
 We burst there as the worm into the fly,  
 Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no !  
 Zeus has not yet revealed it ; and alas,  
 (10) He must have done so, were it possible !

Live long and happy, and in that thought die :  
 Glad for what was ! Farewell. And for the rest,  
 I cannot tell thy messenger aright  
 Where to deliver what he bears of thine  
 To one called Paulus ; we have heard his fame  
 Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—  
 I know not, nor am troubled much to know.  
 Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,  
 As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,  
 Hath access to a secret shut from us ?  
 Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,  
 In stooping to inquire of such an one,  
 As if his answer could impose at all !  
 He writeth, doth he ? well, and he may write.  
 O, the Jew findeth scholars ! certain slaves  
 Who touched on this same isle, preached him and Christ ;  
 And (as I gathered from a bystander)  
 (11) Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.

## NOTES.

(1) "Sprinkled isles" refer, very likely, to the Sporades, so called because scattered or strung along in something of a line (in the Ægean Sea) on the west coast of Asia. Cos, Patmos, Samos, Lemnos, Scio, Rhodes, and many others belong to the group.

(2) "Tyranny" is used, of course, in the ancient Greek sense, and not in that of modern times. It did not imply necessarily an oppressive rule. Protus, as well as Cleon, is an imaginary character, but both are drawn to the life and faithfully represent the thought of the time.

(3) Phare, a contraction of Pharos, the ancient lighthouse of white marble at the entrance of the port of Alexandria, used for any lighthouse ; here quite probably for one at the port of Athens.

(4) Pœcile, the Painted Porch at Athens where Zeno taught.

(5) In Greek music the scales were called moods or modes, and were

very varied in their arrangement of the steps and half steps, going by many names, such as Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, etc.

(6) He argues in this section for the real superiority of the men of his time, like himself, to "those divine men of old"—who surpassed the moderns at some single point which they had carried further, but were inferior in that they had not so much breadth of sympathy, could not compass so wide a range of activity or combine "in such a synthesis" the various excellencies of all predecessors. It is in this way, he claims, that progress is exhibited and the purpose of Zeus vindicated: the expansion and perfection of mankind.

(7) The melancholy review of life from the standpoint of old age, according to the Greek poet, given us in the following lines, may well be compared with the bright retrospect and prospect shown by the Jewish Rabbi Ben Ezra, a complementary picture to this.

(8) Cleon counts life a discouraging failure, in spite of the progress seen in some directions, because man's desires increase faster than his ability to meet them, his "soul sees much," has aspirations which the flesh negatives, he cannot enlarge his "bounded physical recipiency" or repair the waste of age, he beats in vain against the iron door of death which shuts him in and mocks his labor. Hence it had been better not to let man come to full consciousness of his soul; he surpasses the beasts in misery rather than in gladness, since they have no longings which cannot be satisfied. He "gets no answer" to the problem of existence, and cannot vindicate the ways of Zeus.

(9) He shows how the artist is really no better off than the king. Depicting joy is not its possession; the difference between the immortality of the two is only in word, not in truth; there is no genuine satisfaction, after all, in survival by one's works if the living, enjoying man has utterly vanished from existence. He finds the outlook "horrible."

This is truly a wail from the very heart of the ancient world at its point of highest culture. The absence of assurance of future life filled the present with gloom in spite of all seeming success and the many means of sensual pleasure which were at the disposal of the writer, as well as of the king. We are strongly reminded of the similar dismal notes in Ecclesiastes, where we read, "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" (i, 3.) "For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool forever" (ii, 16). "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (iii, 20). "There is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked;" "the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward;" "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave" (ix, 2, 5, 10). How desolate and sad the soul which has no hope of a hereafter!

(10) "If it were not so, I would have told you" (John xiv, 2). That

which the classic world, filled with an unutterable longing, strained its eyes in vain to see, Jesus of Nazareth made clear.

(11) This passage about Paul is extremely touching and suggestive. He was on this coast and at these very isles at this time, but the scholarship of the day had no use for him, looked in that direction for no good thing. "The world through its wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. i, 21), nor could it fathom the truths of the new Gospel, from which it turned away in contemptuous pride. But it has come now to be seen that the doctrine of Christ and Paul can be *rejected* "by no sane man."

## AN EPISTLE

CONTAINING THE STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN.\*

Karshish, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,  
 The not-incurious in God's handiwork  
 (This man's-flesh he hath admirably made,  
 Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,  
 To coop up and keep down on earth a space  
 That puff of vapor from his mouth, man's soul)  
 —To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,  
 Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,  
 Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks  
 Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,  
 Whereby the wily vapor fain would slip  
 Back and rejoin its source before the term,—  
 And aptest in contrivance (under God)  
 To baffle it by deftly stopping such :—  
 The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home  
 Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace)

- (1) Three samples of true snake-stone—rarer still,  
 One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,  
 (But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)  
 And writeth now the twenty-second time.

\* Well called "one of Browning's most remarkable psychological studies." Nowhere does he more fully show his dramatic power and penetrative insight into the heart of man. The state of mind both of the Arab physician, Karshish, and the Jew, Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, are wonderfully depicted. We feel that we are looking through their eyes and thinking their thoughts, that we have the very language which the traveler must have used in his report to his teacher, Abib. The whole is so extremely real that we seem to be transported to the little town of Bethany in the year 66 of the Christian era—for the reference to Vespasian fixes that as the time of the letter.

It is, as has been remarked, "a signal example of emotional ratiocination. There is a flash of ecstasy through the strange, cautious description of Karshish; every syllable is weighed and thoughtful; everywhere the lines swell into perfect feeling." The professional attitude of the

- My journeyings were brought to Jericho :  
 Thus I resume. Who studious in our art  
 Shall count a little labor unrepaid ?  
 I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone  
 On many a flinty furlong of this land.  
 Also, the country-side is all on fire  
 With rumors of a marching hitherward :  
 (2) Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.  
 A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear ;  
 Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls :  
 I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.  
 Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,  
 And once a town declared me for a spy ;  
 But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,  
 Since this poor covert where I pass the night,  
 This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence  
 A man with plague-sores at the third degree  
 Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here !  
 'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,  
 To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip  
 And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.  
 A viscid choler is observable  
 (3) In tertians, I was nearly bold to say ;  
 And falling-sickness hath a happier cure  
 Than our school wots of: there's a spider here  
 Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,

physician is drawn with marvelous fidelity. He is a typical representative of the scientific intellect bent upon positive, practical results. He carefully attempts a plain statement of the case from a purely medical point of view ; but he cannot altogether repress or disguise the strange interest which the man's story has awakened in him. And at last, in the postscript, breaking through all pretense and simulation, he shows the genuine feeling of his heart, which is that of the human heart in general, a yearning for a God of love and for the rest which the knowledge of such a truth must give.

The physician cannot conceive that Lazarus is otherwise than mad. It is a case of mania, due to a prolonged epileptic trance, from which he too suddenly awoke. Nevertheless he has to admit that it is by no means an ordinary mania, in that it has eaten so deeply into the man's inmost being, and is thoroughly consistent with itself. He is half ashamed of the hold upon him which the man and his story have acquired, is afraid his friend will despise his credulity, tries to recover his mental balance by recounting in careful detail his most recent discoveries, apologizes repeatedly for his digression from these more important matters, but finally bursts forth in the passionate appeal which echoes the words and the mission of Jesus.

In Lazarus, whose state of mind is so skillfully analyzed, we have a

Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-gray back ;  
 Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his mind,  
 The Syrian runagate I trust this to ?  
 His service payeth me a sublime  
 Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.  
 Best wait : I reach Jerusalem at morn,  
 There set in order my experiences,  
 Gather what most deserves, and give thee all—  
 Or I might add, Judea's gum-tragacanth  
 Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,  
 Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,  
 In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease  
 Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—  
 (4) Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar—  
 But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay : my Syrian blinketh gratefully,  
 Protesteth his devotion is my price—  
 Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal ?  
 (5) I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,  
 What set me off a-writing first of all.  
 An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang !  
 For, be it this town's barrenness—or else  
 The Man had something in the look of him—  
 His case has struck me far more than 'tis worth.  
 So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose  
 In the great press of novelty at hand  
 The care and pains this somehow stole from me)  
 I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,

study of the results which so abnormal an experience must have wrought upon his subsequent life. He had seen things as they are. His life had passed out of the phenomenal into that of the real. His standards were entirely different from those of the men around him. His wonder and his sorrow were drawn from the reflection that his fellows remained in the region of phantasm. He lived in the world to come. Infinitely little seemed to him the things of time and sense in the presence of eternal realities. He had but one desire, that of pleasing God, but he had a great love for humanity, and sin and ignorance were the only things that roused his indignation. He lived up to the truths often so meaningless on the lips of Christians, and measured everything by that which infinity had taught him.

On the other hand, life had in great measure lost its interest for him and its educative power. Probation was practically over with him ; he was incapacitated for the present world, reduced to apathy and inaction, his life a half-slumberous waiting for the close rather than a strenuous ardent striving after ever loftier aims. The incident shows that doubt and mystery, so frequently complained of in life and in religion, are

Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth ?  
 The very man is gone from me but now,  
 Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.  
 Thus then, and let thy better wit help all !

'Tis but a case of mania—subinduced  
 By epilepsy, at the turning-point  
 Of trance prolonged unduly some three days :  
 When, by the exhibition of some drug  
 Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art  
 Unknown to me and which 'twere well to know,  
 The evil thing out-breaking all at once  
 Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,—  
 But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide,  
 Making a clear house of it too suddenly,  
 The first conceit that entered might inscribe  
 Whatever it was minded on the wall  
 So plainly at that vantage, as it were,  
 (First come, first served) that nothing subsequent  
 Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls  
 The just-returned and new-established soul  
 Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart  
 That henceforth she will read or these or none.  
 And first—the man's own firm conviction rests  
 That he was dead (in fact they buried him)  
 —That he was dead and then restored to life

necessary concomitants of both, without which neither would be at its best. It is not well for us to be lifted too far out of the region of conflict and struggle. A certain and immediate conception of the unseen world paralyzes earthly activity. We must learn by degrees to use the heavenly treasure—not demand our inheritance before we have attained our majority. The limitation of our perception of truth is needful in order that the soul may exert itself to obtain the relative good of the present sphere, may undergo that discipline which is the purpose of the present stage of existence. This poem is a good answer to those who demand that the All-Wise should not leave men to struggle in the region of phenomena, where is so much uncertainty, but should reveal to us the actual in the present life. As is shown also in *La Saisiaz* a condition of too great certainty would destroy the schooltime value of life. The highest truths are not susceptible of mathematical demonstration. Lazarus, it is also worth noting, had no power to win his fellows to his faith, he simply stood among them as a patient witness to the overwhelming reality of the divine. Browning shows in this example how the exclusive dominance of the spiritual disturbs the balance of active human life, while it leaves the passive life crowned with unearthly beauty.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

By a Nazarene physician of his tribe :  
 —“Sayeth, the same bade “Rise,” and he did rise.  
 “Such cases are diurnal,” thou wilt cry.  
 Not so this figment !—not, that such a fume,  
 Instead of giving way to time and health,  
 Should eat itself into the life of life,  
 As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all !  
 For see, how he takes up the after-life.  
 The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,  
 Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,  
 The body’s habit wholly laudable,  
 As much, indeed, beyond the common health  
 As he were made and put aside to show.  
 Think, could we penetrate by any drug  
 And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,  
 And bring it clear and fair, by three days’ sleep !  
 Whence has the man the balm that brightens all ?

(6) This grown man eyes the world now like a child.  
 Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,  
 Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,  
 To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,  
 Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—  
 He listened not except I spoke to him,  
 But folded his two hands and let them talk,  
 Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no fool.

And that’s a sample how his years must go.  
 Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,  
 Should find a treasure,—can he use the same  
 With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,  
 And take at once to his impoverished brain  
 The sudden element that changes things,  
 That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand  
 And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust ?  
 Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—  
 Warily parsimonious, when no need,  
 Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times ?  
 All prudent counsel as to what befits  
 The golden mean, is lost on such an one :  
 The man’s fantastic will is the man’s law.  
 So here—we call the treasure knowledge, say,  
 Increased beyond the fleshly faculty—  
 Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,  
 (7) Earth forced on a soul’s use while seeing heaven :  
 The man is witless of the size, the sum,  
 The value in proportion of all things,  
 Or whether it be little or be much.  
 Discourse to him of prodigious armaments  
 Assembled to besiege his city now,  
 And of the passing of a mule with gourds—  
 ‘Tis one ! Then take it on the other side,  
 Speak of some trifling fact,—he will gaze rapt  
 With stupor at its very littleness,

(Far as I see) as if in that indeed  
 He caught prodigious import, whole results ;  
 And so will turn to us the bystanders  
 In ever the same stupor (note this point)  
 That we too see not with his opened eyes.  
 Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,  
 Preposterously, at cross purposes.  
 Should his child sicken unto death,—why, look  
 For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,  
 Or pretermission of the daily craft !  
 While a word, gesture, glance from that same child  
 At play or in the school or laid asleep  
 Will startle him to an agony of fear,  
 Exasperation, just as like. Demand  
 The reason why—“ ‘tis but a word,” object—  
 “ A gesture ”—he regards thee as our lord  
 Who lived there in the pyramid alone,  
 Looked at us (dost thou mind ?) when, being young,  
 We both would unadvisedly recite  
 Some charm’s beginning, from that book of his,  
 Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst  
 All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.

(8) Thou and the child have each a veil alike  
 Thrown o’er your heads, from under which ye both  
 Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match

(9) Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know !  
 He holds on firmly to some thread of life—  
 (It is the life to lead perforceedly)

(10) Which runs across some vast distracting orb  
 Of glory on either side that meager thread,  
 Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—  
 The spiritual life around the early life :  
 The law of that is known to him as this,  
 His heart and brain move, there, his feet stay here.  
 So is the man perplexed with impulses  
 Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,  
 Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,  
 And not along, this black thread through the blaze—  
 “ It should be ” balked by “ here it cannot be.”  
 And oft the man’s soul springs into his face  
 As if he saw again and heard again  
 His sage that bade him “ Rise ” and he did rise.  
 Something, a word, a tick o’ the blood within  
 Admonishes : then back he sinks at once  
 To ashes, who was very fire before,  
 In sedulous recurrence to his trade  
 Whereby he earneth him the daily bread :  
 And studiously the humbler for that pride,  
 Professedly the faultier that he knows  
 God’s secret, while he holds the thread of life.  
 Indeed the especial marking of the man  
 Is prone submission to the heavenly will—  
 Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last  
 For that same death which must restore his being  
 To equilibrium, body loosening soul  
 Divorced even now by premature full growth :  
 He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live  
 So long as God please, and just how God please.  
 He even seeketh not to please God more  
 (Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.  
 Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach  
 The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,  
 Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do :  
 How can he give his neighbor the real ground,  
 His own conviction ? Ardent as he is—  
 Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old  
 "Be it as God please" reassureth him.  
 I probed the sore as thy disciple should :  
 "How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness  
 Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march  
 To stamp out like a little spark thy town,  
 Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once ?"  
 He merely looked with his large eyes on me.  
 The man is apathetic, you deduce ?  
 Contrariwise, he loves both old and young.  
 Able and weak, affects the very brutes  
 And birds—how say I? flowers of the field—  
 As a wise workman recognizes tools  
 In a master's workshop, loving what they make.  
 Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb :

- (ii) Only impatient, let him do his best,  
 At ignorance and carelessness and sin—  
 And indignation which is promptly curbed :  
 As when in certain travel I have feigned  
 To be an ignoramus in our art  
 According to some preconceived design,  
 And happed to hear the land's practitioners,  
 Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,  
 Prattle fantastically on disease,  
 Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace !

Thou wilt object—Why have I not ere this  
 Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene  
 Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,  
 Conferring with the frankness that befits ?  
 Alas ! it grieveth me, the learned leech  
 Perished in a tumult many years ago,  
 Accused—our learning's fate—of wizardry,  
 Rebellion, to the setting up a rule  
 And creed prodigious as described to me.  
 His death, which happened when the earthquake fell  
 (Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss  
 To occult learning in our lord the sage  
 Who lived there in the pyramid alone)  
 Was wrought by the mad people—that's their wont !

On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,  
 To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—  
 How could he stop the earthquake? That's their way!  
 The other imputations must be lies:  
 But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,  
 In mere respect for any good man's fame.  
 (And after all, our patient Lazarus  
 Is stark mad; should we count on what he says?  
 Perhaps not: though in writing to a leech  
 'Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)  
 This man so cured regards the curer, then,  
 As—God forgive me! who but God himself,  
 Creator and sustainer of the world,  
 That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!  
 —'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,  
 Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,  
 Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,  
 And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,  
 And must have so avouched himself, in fact,  
 In hearing of this very Lazarus  
 Who saith—but why all this of what he saith?  
 Why write of trivial matters, things of price  
 Calling at every moment for remark?  
 I noticed on the margin of a pool  
 (12) Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,  
 Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,  
 Which, now that I review it, needs must seem  
 Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth!  
 Nor I myself discern in what is writ  
 Good cause for the peculiar interest  
 And awe indeed this man has touched me with.  
 Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness  
 Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus:  
 I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills  
 Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came  
 A moon made like a face with certain spots  
 Multiform, manifold, and menacing:  
 Then a wind rose behind me. So we met  
 In this old sleepy town at unaware,  
 The man and I. I send thee what is writ.  
 Regard it as a chance, a matter risked  
 To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose,  
 Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.  
 Jerusalem's repose shall make amends  
 For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine;  
 Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?  
 So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—  
 So, through the thunder comes a human voice  
 Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!"

Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself !  
 Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,  
 But love I gave thee, with myself to love,  
 And thou must love me ~~for I have given thee !~~  
 The madman saith He said so : it is strange.

## NOTES.

(1) Snake-stone. A certain kind of stone or other substance—commonly a porous and absorbent material, like animal charcoal or chalk—used as a remedy for snake-bites, and popularly supposed to charm away or absorb the poison.

(2) T. Flavianus Sabinus Vespasianus was Roman emperor from 70 to 79. He was sent by Nero, in A. D. 66, to conduct the war against the Jews; but when proclaimed emperor by his legions, after the murder of Galba, he left his son Titus to prosecute the siege of Jerusalem.

(3) Tertiens. A form of fever the paroxysms of which return every third day. The spider referred to is called the zebra spider, also the *lycosid*, or wolf spider, and belongs to the wandering group that stalk their prey in the open field or in divers lurking places. The ancient use of spiders in medicine is well known. Karshish is about to tell his master that five of these spiders will do wonders as a remedy, when distrust of the messenger, who is to take the letter in payment for a benefit to his eye, stops his pen.

(4) Zoar. A small city at the southeast corner of the Dead Sea (Gen. xiii, 10; xiv, 2; xix, 22, 30, etc.). "Hadst admired" for "wouldst have admired."

(5) The hesitating, apologetic way in which he presents the case, as though reproaching himself for yielding to an interest which he has tried to shake off as unworthy but cannot, and endeavors to conceal, is admirably done.

(6) "Except ye . . . become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii, 3).

(7) This "seeing heaven" is "the balm that brightens all" referred to a little above. His eyes have been "opened."

(8) "Thou"; that is, anyone, however learned in this world's lore, as well as the child just mentioned, has, in the estimation of Lazarus, a veil upon him, covering the real meaning of things.

(9) Greek fire. A precursor of gunpowder; an incendiary composition used by the Byzantine Greeks, supposed to have been made of asphalt, saltpeter, and sulphur; it would burn on and under the water.

(10) He is forced to lead the common, natural life here on earth, while the spiritual life—the heavenly—seems all around him like a bright background of glory, a blazing orb in contrast to a black thread.

(11) An impatience and an indignation like to that which an angel or a Christ would have, and which we feel too seldom (Matt. xvii, 17; xxi, 12; Mark iii, 5).

(12) This plant was deemed by the ancients one of the four cordial flowers for cheering the spirits—the others being rose, violet, and alkanet. Aleppo, the Syrian city, was famous for it.

The juxtaposition of these two contrasted things—a flower and an asserted Godhead—together with the rating of the latter as the trivial, is very sharp and striking. Such miscalculation as to relative importances is common even now.

#### A DEATH IN THE DESERT.\*

[Supposed of Pamphylax the Antiochene :  
It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,  
Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek,  
And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu* :  
Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest,  
Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,  
Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi*,  
From Xanthus, my wife's uncle now at peace :  
*Mu* and *Epsilon* stand for my own name.  
I may not write it, but I make a cross  
To show I wait His coming, with the rest,  
And leave off here : beginneth Pamphylax.]

I said, " If one should wet his lips with wine,  
And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,  
Or else the lappet of a linen robe,  
Into the water-vessel, lay it right,  
And cool his forehead just above the eyes,  
The while a brother, kneeling either side,  
Should chafe each hand and try to make it warm,—  
He is not so far gone but he might speak."

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\* This has been called "the only poem of Browning's which is concerned with Christian faith as a product of history, going back to the origins of Christianity and tracing from them a systematic development." Being thoroughly orthodox, and conceived in perfect harmony with whatever facts are known, or handed down by tradition, as to the last days of the beloved disciple, it comes to us almost with the freshness and force of a veritable chronicle; yet it is thoroughly adapted to the needs of to-day and is full of profound thought. It was written to combat the rationalistic, anti-supernatural teachings of Strauss, to maintain the truthfulness of Christianity and its trustworthiness as a spiritual interpretation of life and the world. It will not be found altogether easy reading, but with the help of the notes appended, and with repeated perusals, it will, we think, be sufficiently clear.

This did not happen in the outer cave,  
 Nor in the secret chamber of the rock,  
 Where, sixty days since the decree was out,  
 We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,  
 And waited for his dying all the while ;  
 But in the midmost grotto : since noon's light  
 Reached there a little, and we would not lose  
 The last of what might happen on his face.

I at the head, and Xanthus at the feet,  
 With Valens and the Boy, had lifted him,  
 And brought him from the chamber in the depths,  
 And laid him in the light where we might see :  
 For certain smiles began about his mouth,  
 And his lips moved, presageful of the end.

Beyond, and halfway up the mouth o' the cave,  
 The Bactrian convert, having his desire,  
 Kept watch, and made pretence to graze a goat  
 That gave us milk, on rags of various herb,  
 Plantain and quitch, the rocks' shade keeps alive :  
 So that if any thief or soldier passed,  
 (Because the persecution was aware,)  
 Yielding the goat up promptly with his life,  
 Such man might pass on, joyful at a prize,  
 Nor care to pry into the cool o' the cave.  
 Outside was all noon and the burning blue.

"Here is wine," answered Xanthus,—dropped a drop ;  
 I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,  
 Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left :  
 But Valens had bethought him, and produced  
 And broke a ball of nard, and made perfume.  
 Only, he did—not so much wake, as—turn  
 And smile a little, as a sleeper does  
 If any dear one call him, touch his face—  
 And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept :  
 It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,  
 Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,  
 Stung by the splendor of a sudden thought,  
 And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead  
 Out of the secret chamber, found a place,  
 Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,  
 And spoke, as 'twere his mouth proclaiming first,  
 "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once,  
 And sat up of himself, and looked at us ;  
 And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word :

Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry  
 Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,  
 As signal we were safe, from time to time.

- (2) First he said, " If a friend declared to me,  
 This my son Valens, this my other son,  
 Were James and Peter,—nay, declared as well  
 This lad was very John,—I could believe !  
 —Could, for a moment, doubtlessly believe :  
 So is myself withdrawn into my depths,  
 The soul retreated from the perished brain  
 Whence it was wont to feel and use the world  
 Through these dull members, done with long ago.  
 Yet I myself remain ; I feel myself :  
 And there is nothing lost. Let be, awhile ! "

[This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,  
 How divers persons witness in each man,  
 Three souls which make up one soul : first, to wit,  
 A soul of each and all the bodily parts,  
 Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,  
 And has the use of earth, and ends the man  
 Downward : but, tending upward for advice,  
 Grows into, and again is grown into  
 By the next soul, which, seated in the brain,  
 Useth the first with its collected use,  
 And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows :  
 Which, duly tending upward in its turn,  
 Grows into, and again is grown into  
 By the last soul, that uses both the first,  
 Subsisting whether they assist or no,  
 And, constituting man's self, is what Is—  
 And leans upon the former, makes it play,  
 As that played off the first : and, tending up,  
 Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man  
 Upward in that dread point of intercourse,  
 Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.  
 What Does, what Knows, what Is ; three souls, one man.]

- (3) I give the glossa as Theotypas.]

And then, " A stick, once fire from end to end ;  
 Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark !  
 Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself  
 A little where the fire was : thus I urge  
 The soul that served me, till it task once more  
 What ashes of my brain have kept their shape,  
 And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,  
 Trying to taste again the truth of things"—  
 (He smiled)—" their very superficial truth ;  
 As that ye are my sons, that it is long  
 Since James and Peter had release by death,  
 And I am only he, your brother John,  
 Who saw and heard, and could remember all.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Remember all ! It is not much to say.  
 What if the truth broke on me from above  
 As once and oftentimes ? Such might hap again :  
 Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,  
 With head wool-white, eyes flame, and feet like brass,  
 The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen—  
 I who now shudder only and surmise  
 ' How did your brother bear that sight and live ? '

" If I live yet, it is for good, more love  
 Through me to men : be naught but ashes here  
 That keep awhile my semblance, who was John,—  
 Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth  
 No one alive who knew (consider this !)  
 —Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands  
 That which was from the first, the Word of Life.

(4) How will it be when none more saith ' I saw ? '

" Such ever was love's way : to rise, it stoops.  
 Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach,  
 I went, for many years, about the world,  
 Saying ' It was so ; so I heard and saw,'  
 Speaking as the case asked : and men believed.  
 Afterward came the message to myself  
 In Patmos isle ; I was not bidden teach,  
 But simply listen, take a book and write,  
 Not set down other than the given word,  
 With nothing left to my arbitrament  
 To choose or change : I wrote, and men believed,  
 Then, for my time grew brief, no message more,  
 No call to write again, I found a way,  
 And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely taught  
 Men should, for love's sake, in love's strength believe ;  
 Or I would pen a letter to a friend  
 And urge the same as friend, nor less nor more :  
 Friends said I reasoned rightly, and believed.  
 But at the last, why, I seemed left alive  
 Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,  
 To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared  
 When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things ;  
 Left to repeat, ' I saw, I heard, I knew,'  
 And go all over the old ground again,  
 With Antichrist already in the world,  
 And many Antichrists, who answered prompt,  
 ' Am I not Jasper as thyself art John ?'  
 Nay, young, whereas through age thou mayest forget :  
 Wherefore, explain, or how shall we believe ?'  
 I never thought to call down fire on such,  
 Or, as in wonderful and early days,  
 Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent dumb ;  
 But patient stated much of the Lord's life  
 Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work :  
 Since much that at the first, in deed and word,

Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,  
 Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,  
 Fed through such years, familiar with such light,  
 Guarded and guided still to see and speak)  
 Of new significance and fresh result :  
 What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,  
 And named them in the gospel I have writ.  
 For men said, ' It is getting long ago :  
 Where is the promise of his coming ? '—asked  
 These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,  
 Of me who, when their sires were born, was old.  
 I, for I loved them, answered, joyfully,  
 Since I was there, and helpful in my age ;  
 And, in the main, I think such men believed.  
 Finally, thus endeavoring, I fell sick,  
 Ye brought me here, and I supposed the end,  
 And went to sleep with one thought that, at least,  
 Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,  
 We had the truth, might leave the rest to God.  
 Yet now I wake in such decrepitude  
 As I had slidden down and fallen afar,  
 Past even the presence of my former self,  
 Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,  
 Till I am found away from my own world,  
 Feeling for foothold through a blank profound,  
 Along with unborn people in strange lands,  
 Who say—I hear said or conceive they say—  
 ' Was John at all, and did he say he saw ?  
 (5) Assure us, ere we ask what he might see ! '

" And how shall I assure them ? Can they share  
 —They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength  
 About each spirit, that needs must bide its time,  
 Living and learning still as years assist  
 Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see—  
 With me who hardly am withheld at all,  
 But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,  
 Lie bare to the universal prick of light ?  
 Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,  
 We whom God loves ? When pain ends, gain ends too.  
 To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death  
 Of which I wrote ' it was '—to me, it is ;  
 —Is, here and now : I apprehend naught else.  
 Is not God now i' the world his power first made ?  
 Is not his love at issue still with sin,  
 Visibly when a wrong is done on earth ?  
 Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around ?  
 Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise  
 To the right hand of the throne—what is it beside,  
 When such truth, breaking bounds, o'erfloods my soul,  
 And, as I saw the sin and death, even so  
 See I the need yet transiency of both,  
 The good and glory consummated thence ?

I saw the power ; I see the Love, once weak,  
 Resume the Power : and in this word 'I see,'  
 Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both  
 That moving o'er the spirit of man, unblinds  
 His eye and bids him look. These are, I see ;  
 But ye, the children, his beloved ones too,  
 Ye need,—as I should use an optic glass  
 I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i' the world,  
 It had been given a crafty smith to make ;  
 A tube, he turned on objects brought too close,  
 Lying confusedly insubordinate  
 For the unassisted eye to master once :  
 Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,  
 Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear !  
 Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth  
 I see, reduced to plain historic fact,  
 Diminished into clearness, proved a point  
 And far away : ye would withdraw your sense  
 From out eternity, strain it upon time,  
 Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death,  
 Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, disspread,  
 As though a star should open out, all sides,

(6) Grow the world on you, as it is my world.

" For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,  
 And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,—  
 Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,  
 How love might be, hath been indeed, and is ;  
 And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost  
 Such prize despite the envy of the world,  
 And, having gained truth, keep truth : that is all.  
 But see the double way wherein we are led,  
 How the soul learns diversely from the flesh !  
 With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,  
 And yields mere basement for the soul's emprise,  
 Expect prompt teaching. Helpful was the light,  
 And warmth was cherishing and food was choice  
 To every man's flesh, thousand years ago,  
 As now to yours and mine ; the body sprang  
 At once to the height, and stayed : but the soul,—no !  
 Since sages who, this noon tide, meditate  
 In Rome or Athens, may descry some point  
 Of the eternal power, hid yestereve ;  
 And, as thereby the power's whole mass extends,  
 So much extends the æther floating o'er  
 The love that tops the might, the Christ in God.  
 Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these  
 Till earth's work stop and useless time run out,  
 So duly, daily, needs provision be  
 For keeping the soul's prowess possible,  
 Building new barriers as the old decay,  
 Saving us from evasion of life's proof,  
 Putting the question ever, ' Does God love,

And will ye hold that truth against the world ?'  
 Ye know there needs no second proof with good  
 Gained for our flesh from any earthly source :  
 We might go freezing, ages,—give us fire,  
 Thereafter we judge fire at its full worth,  
 And guard it safe through every chance, ye know !

- (7) That fable of Prometheus and his theft,  
 How mortals gained Jove's fiery flower, grows old  
 (I have been used to hear the pagans own)  
 And out of mind ; but fire, how'er its birth,  
 Here is it, precious to the sophist now  
 Who laughs the myth of *Æschylus* to scorn,  
 As precious to those satyrs of his play,  
 Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.  
 While were it so with the soul,—this gift of truth  
 Once grasped, were this our soul's gain safe, and sure  
 To prosper as the body's gain is wont,—  
 Why, man's probation would conclude, his earth  
 Crumble ; for he both reasons and decides,  
 Weighs first, then chooses : will he give up fire  
 For gold or purple once he knows its worth ?  
 Could he give Christ up were his worth as plain ?  
 Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift,  
 Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,  
 And straightway in his life acknowledge it,  
 As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.

- (8) Sigh ye, 'It had been easier once than now ?'  
 To give you answer I am left alive ;  
 Look at me who was present from the first !  
 Ye know what things I saw ; then came a test,  
 My first, befitting me who so had seen :  
 'Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured; him  
 Who trod the sea and brought the dead to life ?  
 What should wring this from thee !—ye laugh and ask.  
 What wrung it ? Even a torchlight and a noise,  
 The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,  
 And fear of what the Jews might do ! Just that,  
 And it is written, 'I forsook and fled :'  
 There was my trial, and it ended thus.  
 Ay, but my soul had gained its truth, could grow :  
 Another year or two,—what little child,  
 What tender woman that had seen no least  
 Of all my sights, but barely heard them told,  
 Who did not clasp the cross with a light laugh,  
 Or wrap the burning robe round, thanking God ?  
 Well, was truth safe forever, then ? Not so.  
 Already had begun the silent work  
 Whereby truth, deadened of its absolute blaze,  
 Might need love's eye to pierce the o'erstretched doubt.  
 Teachers were busy, whispering 'All is true  
 As the aged ones report : but youth can reach  
 Where age gropes dimly, weak with stir and strain,  
 And the full doctrine slumbers till to-day.'

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Thus, what the Roman's lowered spear was found,  
A bar to me who touched and handled truth,  
Now proved the glozing of some new shrewd tongue,

- (9) This Ebion, this Cerinthus or their mates,  
Till imminent was the outcry 'Save our Christ !'  
Whereon I stated much of the Lord's life  
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.  
Such work done, as it will be, what comes next ?  
What do I hear say, or conceive men say,  
'Was John at all, and did he say he saw ?  
Assure us, ere we ask what he might see !'

" Is this indeed a burden for late days,  
And may I help to bear it with you all,  
Using my weakness which becomes your strength ?  
For if a babe were born inside this grot,  
Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,  
Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light's place,—  
One loving him and wishful he should learn,  
Would much rejoice himself was blinded first  
Month by month here, so made to understand  
How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss :  
I think I could explain to such a child  
There was more glow outside than gleams he caught,  
Ay, nor need urge ' I saw it, so believe !'  
It is a heavy burden you shall bear  
In later days, new lands, or old grown strange,  
Left without me, which must be very soon.  
What is the doubt, my brothers ? Quick with it !  
I see you stand conversing, each new face,  
Either in fields, of yellow summer eves,  
On islets yet unnamed amid the sea ;  
Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico  
Out of the crowd in some enormous town  
Where now the larks sing in a solitude ;  
Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand  
Idly conjectured to be Ephesus :  
And no one asks his fellow any more  
' Where is the promise of his coming ?' but  
' Was he revealed in any of his lives,  
As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul ?'

" Quick, for time presses, tell the whole mind out,  
And let us ask and answer and be saved !  
My book speaks on, because it cannot pass ;  
One listens quietly, nor scoffs but pleads,  
' Here is a tale of things done ages since ;  
What truth was ever told the second day ?  
Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for naught.  
Remains the doctrine, love ; well, we must love,  
And what we love most, power and love in one,  
Let us acknowledge on the record here,  
Accepting these in Christ : must Christ then be ?

Has he been ? Did not we ourselves make him ?  
 Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.  
 First of the love, then ; we acknowledge Christ—  
 A proof we comprehend his love, a proof  
 We had such love already in ourselves,  
 Knew first what else we should not recognize,  
 'Tis mere projection from man's inmost mind,  
 And, what he loves, thus falls reflected back,  
 Becomes accounted somewhat out of him ;  
 He throws it up in air, it drops down earth's,  
 With shape, name, story added, man's old way.  
 How prove you Christ came otherwise at least ?  
 Next try the power : he made and rules the world :  
 Certes there is a world once made, now ruled,  
 Unless things have been ever as we see.  
 Our sires declared a charioteer's yoked steeds  
 Brought the sun up the east and down the west,  
 Which only of itself now rises, sets,  
 As if a hand impelled it and a will,—  
 Thus they long thought, they who had will and hands :  
 But the new question's whisper is distinct,  
 Wherefore must all force needs be like ourselves ?  
 We have the hands, the will ; what made and drives  
 The sun is force, is law, is named, not known,  
 While will and love we do know ; marks of these,  
 Eye-witnesses attest, so books declare—  
 As that, to punish or reward our race,  
 The sun at undue times arose or set  
 Or else stood still : what do not men affirm ?  
 But earth requires as urgently reward  
 Or punishment to-day as years ago,  
 And none expects the sun will interpose :  
 Therefore it was mere passion and mistake,  
 Or erring zeal for right, which changed the truth.  
 Go back, far, farther, to the birth of things ;  
 Ever the will, the intelligence, the love,  
 Man's !—which he gives, supposing he but finds,  
 As late he gave head, body, hands and feet,  
 To help these in what forms he calls his gods.  
 First, Jove's brow, Juno's eyes were swept away,  
 But Jove's wrath, Juno's pride continued long ;  
 As last, will, power, and love discarded these,  
 So law in turn discards power, love, and will.  
 What provereth God is otherwise at least ?  
 (10) All else, projection from the mind of man !'

" Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,  
 But place my gospel where I put my hands.

" I say that man was made to grow, not stop ;  
 That help, he needed once, and needs no more,  
 Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn :  
 For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

This imports solely, man should mount on each  
 New height in view ; the help whereby he mounts,  
 The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,  
 Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.  
 Man apprehends him newly at each stage  
 Whereat earth's ladder drops, its service done ;  
 And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.  
 You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs  
 To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,  
 And check the careless step would spoil their birth ;  
 But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,  
 Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,  
 It is no longer for old twigs ye look,  
 Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,  
 But to the herb's self, by what light ye boast,  
 For what fruit's signs are. This book's fruit is plain,  
 Nor miracles need prove it any more.  
 Doth the fruit show ? Then miracles bade 'ware  
 At first of root and stem, saved both till now  
 From trampling ox, rough boar and wanton goat.  
 What ? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,  
 And be discharged, and straight wound up anew ?  
 No !—grown, his growth lasts ; taught, he ne'er forgets :

(11) May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.

" This might be pagan teaching : now hear mine.

" I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,  
 Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,  
 So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth :  
 When they can eat, babe's nurture is withdrawn.  
 I fed the babe whether it would or no :  
 I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.  
 I cried once, ' That ye may believe in Christ,  
 Behold this blind man shall receive his sight !'  
 I cry now, ' Urgest thou, *for I am shrewd*  
*And smile at stories how John's word could cure—*  
*Repeat that miracle and take my faith ?*'  
 I say, that miracle was duly wrought  
 When, save for it, no faith was possible.  
 Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the world,  
 Whether the change came from our minds which see  
 Of shows o' the world so much as and no more  
 Than God wills for his purpose,—(what do I  
 See now, suppose you, there where you see rock  
 Round us?)—I know not ; such was the effect,  
 So faith grew, making void more miracles  
 Because too much : they would compel, not help.

(12) I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
 Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
 All questions in the earth and out of it,  
 And has so far advanced thee to be wise.  
 Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved ?

In life's mere minute, with power to use that proof,  
 Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung ?  
 Thou hast it ; use it and forthwith, or die !

" For I say, this is death and the sole death,  
 When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,  
 Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,  
 And lack of love from love made manifest ;  
 A lamp's death when, replete with oil, it chokes ;  
 A stomach's when, surcharged with food, it starves.  
 With ignorance was surety of a cure.  
 When man, appalled at nature, questioned first,  
 ' What if there lurk a might behind this might ?'  
 He needed satisfaction God could give,  
 And did give, as ye have the written word :  
 But when he finds might still redouble might.  
 Yet asks, ' Since all is might, what use of will ?'  
 —Will, the one source of might,—he being man  
 With a man's will and a man's might, to teach  
 In little how the two combine in large,—  
 That man has turned round on himself and stands,  
 Which in the course of nature is, to die.

(13) " And when man questioned, ' What if there be love  
 Behind the will and might, as real as they ?'—  
 He needed satisfaction God could give,  
 And did give, as ye have the written word :  
 But when, beholding that love everywhere,  
 He reasons, ' Since such love is everywhere,  
 And since ourselves can love and would be loved,  
 We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,'—  
 How shall ye help this man who knows himself,  
 That he must love and would be loved again,  
 Yet, owning his own love that progetteth Christ,  
 Rejecteth Christ through very need of him ?  
 The lamp o'erswims with oil, the stomach flags  
 Loaded with nurture, and that man's soul dies.

(14) " If he rejoин, ' But this was all the while  
 A trick ; the fault was, first of all, in thee,  
 Thy story of the places, names and dates,  
 Where, when and how the ultimate truth had rise,  
 —Thy prior truth, at last discovered none,  
 Whence now the second suffers detriment.  
 What good of giving knowledge if, because  
 O' the manner of the gift, its profit fail ?  
 And why refuse what modicum of help  
 Had stopped the after-doubt, impossible  
 I' the face of truth—truth absolute, uniform ?  
 Why must I hit of this and miss of that,  
 Distinguish just as I be weak or strong,  
 And not ask of thee and have answer prompt,  
 Was this once, was it not once ?—then and now

And evermore, plain truth from man to man.  
 Is John's procedure just the heathen bard's?  
 Put question of his famous play again  
 How for the ephemerals' sake, Jove's fire was filched,  
 And carried in a cane and brought to earth:  
*The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,*  
*Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,*  
*Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.*  
 As with the Titan's, so now with thy tale:  
 Why breed in us perplexity, mistake,  
 (15) Nor tell the whole truth in the proper words?"

- "I answer, Have ye yet to argue out  
 The very primal thesis, plainest law,  
 (16) —Man is not God but hath God's end to serve,  
 A master to obey, a course to take,  
 Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become?  
 Grant this, then man must pass from old to new,  
 From vain to real, from mistake to fact,  
 From what once seemed good, to what now proves best.  
 How could man have progression otherwise?  
 Before the point was mooted 'What is God?'  
 No savage man inquired 'What am myself?'  
 Much less replied, 'First, last, and best of things.'  
 Man takes that title now if he believes  
 Might can exist with neither will nor love,  
 In God's case—what he names now Nature's Law—  
 While in himself he recognizes love  
 No less than might and will: and rightly takes.  
 Since if man prove the sole existent thing  
 Where these combine, whatever their degree,  
 However weak the might or will or love,  
 So they be found there, put in evidence,—  
 He is as surely higher in the scale  
 (17) Than any might with neither love nor will,  
 As life, apparent in the poorest midge,  
 (When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its wing.)  
 Is marvelous beyond dead Atlas' self—  
 Given to the nobler midge for resting-place!  
 Thus, man proves best and highest—God, in fine,  
 And thus the victory leads but to defeat,  
 The gain to loss, best rise to the worst fall,  
 His life becomes impossible, which is death.

"But if, appealing thence, he cower, avouch  
 He is mere man, and in humility  
 Neither may know God nor mistake himself;  
 I point to the immediate consequence  
 And say, by such confession straight he falls  
 Into man's place, a thing nor God nor beast,  
 Made to know that he can know and not more:  
 Lower than God who knows all and can all,  
 Higher than beasts which know and can so far

As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,  
 Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more ;  
 While man knows partly but conceives beside,  
 Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,  
 And in this striving, this converting air  
 Into a solid he may grasp and use,  
 Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,  
 Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,  
 Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.  
 Such progress could no more attend his soul  
 Were all it struggles after found at first  
 And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,  
 Than motion wait his body, were all else  
 Than it the solid earth on every side,  
 Where now through space he moves from rest to rest.  
 Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect  
 He could not, what he knows now, know at first ;  
 What he considers that he knows to-day,  
 Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown ;  
 Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns  
 Because he lives, which is to be a man,  
 Set to instruct himself by his past self :  
 First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,  
 Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,  
 Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.  
 God's gift was that man should conceive of truth  
 And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,  
 As midway help till he reach fact indeed.  
 The statuary ere he mold a shape  
 Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next  
 The aspiration to produce the same ;  
 So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,  
 Cries ever 'Now I have the thing I see :'  
 Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,  
 From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.  
 How were it had he cried, 'I see no face,  
 No breast, no feet i' the ineffectual clay ?'  
 Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,  
 And laughed 'It is my shape and lives again !'  
 Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth,  
 Until yourselves applaud the flesh indeed  
 In what is still flesh-imitating clay.  
 Right in you, right in him, such way be man's !  
 God only makes the live shape at a jet.  
 Will ye renounce this pact of creatureship ?  
 The pattern on the Mount subsists no more,  
 Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness ;  
 But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,  
 Serve still and are replaced as time requires :  
 By these, make newest vessels, reach the type !  
 If ye demur, this judgment on your head,  
 Never to reach the ultimate, angel's law,  
 Indulging every instinct of the soul

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing !  
 " Such is the burden of the latest time.  
 I have survived to hear it with my ears,  
 Answer it with my lips : does this suffice ?  
 For if there be a further woe than such,  
 Wherein my brothers struggling need a hand,  
 So long as any pulse is left in mind,  
 May I be absent even longer yet,  
 Plucking the blind ones back from the abyss,  
 Though I should tarry a new hundred years ! "

But he was dead : 'twas about noon, the day  
 Somewhat declining : we five buried him  
 That eve, and then, dividing, went five ways,  
 And I, disguised, returned to Ephesus.

By this, the cave's mouth must be filled with sand.  
 Valens is lost, I know not of his trace ;  
 The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,  
 And could not write nor speak, but only loved :  
 So, lest the memory of this go quite,  
 Seeing that I to-morrow fight the beasts,  
 I tell the same to Phebas, whom believe !  
 For many look again to find that face,  
 Beloved John's to whom I ministered.  
 Somewhere in life about the world ; they err :  
 Either mistaking what was darkly spoke  
 At ending of his book, as he relates,  
 Or misconceiving somewhat of this speech  
 Scattered from mouth to mouth, as I suppose.  
 Believe ye will not see him any more  
 About the world with his divine regard !  
 For all was as I say, and now the man  
 Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

(18) [Cerinthus read and mused ; one added this :

" If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men  
 Mere man, the first and best but nothing more,—  
 Account him, for reward of what he was,  
 Now and forever, wretchedest of all.  
 For see ; himself conceived of life as love,  
 Conceived of love as what must enter in,  
 Fill up, make one with his each soul he loved :  
 Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for him.  
 Well, he is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.  
 But by this time are many souls set free,  
 And very many still retained alive :  
 Nay, should his coming be delayed awhile,  
 Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute),  
 See if, for every finger of thy hands,  
 There be not found, that day the world shall end,

Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ's word  
 That he will grow incorporate with all,  
 With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,  
 Groom for each bride ! Can a mere man do this ?  
 Yet Christ saith, this he lived and died to do.  
 Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,  
 Or lost !"

But 'twas Cerinthus that is lost.]

#### NOTES.

(1) These introductory lines are conceived as being written by a Christian who does not give his name, but who records some unimportant yet interesting particulars concerning the precious manuscript in his library inherited from Xanthus, a Christian of the previous generation, but supposed to be written by a brother still further back, one Pamphylax, of Antioch, who was present in the closing hours of St. John the Evangelist. The scene is laid in a desert cave near Ephesus where five disciples, in a time of persecution, are tenderly guarding the last moments of the beloved teacher and finally succeed in arousing him from the stupor of approaching death, that he may give them his parting counsels.

(2) His soul, which had almost slipped away, struggles back into full consciousness gradually, and with difficulty at first he realizes just who and where he is ; but by degrees he comes completely to himself, and, after a little pause, rallies his failing energies for one last supreme exertion.

(3) A gloss, or marginal note, inserted by one Theotypas, the previous owner of the manuscript. The theory here outlined departs a little from the usual trichotomy which divides human nature into body, soul, and spirit, and which has some support in Scripture (1 Thess. v, 23). It hardly need be said that this curious doctrine of three souls in one man has no substantiation from any of the authentic words of John, and seems rather to be allied with some of the speculative refinements of the Gnostics, which had large sway in the early centuries.

(4) 1 John i, 1, 2. Many other references to Scripture, such as Rev. i, 14; 1 John ii, 18; v, 19, in this part of the poem will be readily recognized. Mr. Browning appears to take the view which formerly prevailed, but is not so generally accepted now, that the Apocalypse was the last book written by John.

(5) Mr. Browning now begins to address himself, in John's name, to that which is the chief theme of the poem—the answering of certain doubts which have arisen in these modern days concerning the sufficiency of the evidence for the claims of Christianity. The fierce attack upon

the historical basis of our religion which was waged by German critics in the earlier part of this century met with no sympathy from the poet, and he takes occasion in the pages that follow to show how he would meet their assault. He is a firm believer in the historic reality of the apostolic testimony.

(6) He will do his best to give them the right point of view to make them, though young, see as he does who has the great advantage of being old, and hence "hardly withheld at all" from that communion with the unseen which is unobstructed by the flesh.

(7) Prometheus, son of the Titan, the fabled bestower of fire upon men, stealing it from Jove, who chained him for punishment to a rock, where an eagle daily devoured his liver, which grew again at night. Both Hesiod and Aeschylus relate, somewhat differently, the legend, which has been variously explained.

(8) This is a favorite thought with Browning, brought out in many poems, that it would not be well for the proof of spiritual things to be mathematical or absolute—that there must be room for doubt, in the management of which a considerable part of our probation lies, and progress is made possible.

(9) Ebion is supposed by some to be the founder of the Ebionites, a sect of Judaizing Christians in the early days, who maintained the authority of the Jewish law and denied the divine nature of Christ. Cerinthus was an heresiarch and Ebionite, holding also Gnostic doctrines, who spread his errors chiefly in Asia Minor near the close of the first century and was vigorously opposed by St. John. He taught, among other things, that Jesus was simply a man, born of Joseph and Mary, who became the Messiah at his baptism, when the Spirit entered into him, but left him before the crucifixion.

(10) Here ends the objection of the critic who claims that what we call the supernatural is only myths projected in former times of ignorance from the mind of man, who now has outgrown these fancies and come to realize that all things are the subject of universal law and there is no intervention of personality.

(11) The testimony of miracles is not needed now, as it was in the beginning, for it has been outgrown, and we see Christianity proving herself by her manifest fruit, and miracles would "compel, not help," leaving no room for faith.

(12) When we rationally and spiritually apprehend "God in Christ," and are "willing to do his will" (John vii, 17), we have a direct evidence of the teaching which has no need to hunt around for miracles and their proof. Personal experience is higher than outward signs.

(13) If man would let his mind work, and not stagnate in practical spiritual death, overcharged with knowledge, he would easily and

sufficiently see that just as human will lies behind his human might and is an essential part thereof, so behind the divine might must lie a divine will.

(14) If the fullness of the divine love which has now flooded man's soul through Christ only causes him to question if there ever was a Christ who is the source of this love, it is similar to the extinction of the lamp through excess of oil. This loss from gain is spiritual death.

(15) The critic now alleges that, though there be some truth in the gospel story, it is mixed with fiction after the manner of the Prometheus fable already alluded to, whereas it should have been told plainly, "in the proper words," just as it was.

(16) The answer is, Man is made for progress; it is his "distinctive mark," which sets him higher than the beasts, but lower than God, for neither of these progress. Man must creep from point to point, separating fact from fancy, and must grow by the discipline of his powers. He rises by successive stages in spiritual insight as he overcomes one set of difficulties after another.

(17) The supremacy of love Browning constantly harps upon, as in the well-known lines, "For the loving worm within its clod were diviner than a loveless God amid his worlds."

(18) Cerinthus (see note 9), the especial opponent of St. John, is supposed to have perused the above manuscript, and to have reaffirmed that Christ was mere man. Some one replies to him that Christ must be either God, or a deceiver and "wretchedest of all." The added postscript serves to heighten the historical effect of the poem.

#### CHRISTMAS-EVE.\*

##### I.

- (1) Out of the little chapel I burst  
 Into the fresh night-air again.  
 Five minutes full, I waited first  
 In the doorway, to escape the rain  
 That drove in gusts down the common's center  
 At the edge of which the chapel stands,  
 Before I plucked up heart to enter.  
 Heaven knows how many sorts of hands  
 Reached past me, groping for the latch  
 Of the inner door that hung on catch

\* Universally considered to be one of the finest religious poems in English literature. This and its companion piece, *Easter-Day*, which follows, were written at Florence in 1850, and published in that year at London. They take up the same general subject, and may well be pondered together. Both give us a vision of Christ; both are studies of religious life and thought dealing directly and primarily with Christianity

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

More obstinate the more they fumbled,  
 Till, giving way at last with a scold  
 Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled  
 One sheep more to the rest in fold,  
 And left me irresolute, standing sentry  
 In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,  
 Six feet long by three feet wide,  
 Partitioned off from the vast inside—  
 I blocked up half of it at least.  
 No remedy; the rain kept driving.  
 They eyed me much as some wild beast,  
 That congregation, still arriving,  
 Some of them by the main road, white  
 A long way past me into the night.  
 Skirting the common, then diverging;  
 Not a few suddenly emerging  
 From the common's self through the paling gaps,  
 —They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,  
 Where the road stops short with its safeguard border  
 Of lamps, as tired of such disorder;—  
 But the most turned in yet more abruptly  
 From a certain squalid lot of alleys,  
 Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,  
 Which now the little chapel rallies

and the beliefs of the day; both describe spiritual experiences appropriate to the time mentioned in the title.

Professor Corson says, "*Christmas-Eve* contains the fullest and most explicit expression of Browning's idea of the person of Christ as being the all-in-all of Christianity." He certainly exhibits the divine man as the source of all that is good and great in human nature and as the regenerator of the race. George Macdonald says: "The great lesson which this poem teaches, and which is taught more directly in *Easter Day*, is that the business of a man's life is to be a Christian. A man has to do with God first—in him only can he find the unity and harmony he seeks. To be one with him is to be at the center of things." "The leading thought in *Christmas-Eve*," says Mr. Nettleship, "is the ever-present sympathy of the divine love with all forms of human love reaching up to God in the form of worship, however soiled or dimmed or thwarted by human passion, intellectual pride, ignorance, or weakness; and from this thought the transition is easy to the idea that mingled faith and love as applied between human beings is the same principle as the complete faith and love for God toward which all men, consciously or unconsciously, tend, and can only exist by means of this latter."

Let the reader note how closely the style and meter follow the mood of the speaker. When the narrative is serious the lines are regular and carefully formed, while the rhymes are single and common. But where

And leads into day again,—its priestliness  
 Lending itself to hide their beastliness  
 So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),  
 And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on  
 Those neophytes too much in lack of it,  
 That, where you cross the common as I did,  
 And meet the party thus presided,  
 " Mount Zion " with Love-lane at the back of it,  
 They front you as little disconcerted  
 As, bound for the hills, her fate averted,  
 And her wicked people made to mind him,  
 Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

## II.

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,  
 In came the flock : the fat weary woman,  
 Panting and bewildered, down-clapping  
 Her umbrella with a mighty report,  
 Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,  
 A wreck of whalebones ; then, with a snort,  
 Like a startled horse, at the interloper  
 (Who humbly knew himself improper,  
 But could not shrink up small enough)  
 —Round to the door, and in,—the gruff  
 Hinge's invariable scold  
 Making my very blood run cold.  
 Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered  
 On broken clogs, the many-tattered  
 Little old-faced peaking sister-turned-mother.  
 Of the sickly babe she tried to smother  
 Somehow up, with its spotted face,  
 From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place ;  
 She too must stop, wring the poor ends dry  
 Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby  
 Her tribute to the doormat, sopping  
 Already from my own clothes' dropping,  
 Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on :  
 Then, stooping down to take off her pattens,  
 She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,  
 Planted together before her breast  
 And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.  
 Close on her heels, the dingy satins

---

humor enters, the rhythm lengthens out its elastic syllables to the fullest possible extent, seeming to swing and sway, to jump and rush, and even the rhyme appears to break out into audible laughter, falling into double and treble form. It has been observed that though one might at first think that the species of verse employed would be least fitted to carry so large a weight of argument, yet, in fact, this argument in any other kind of verse would have been exceedingly dull as a work of art. As it is, the verse is full of never-flagging life and vigor. Where the

Of a female something past me flitted,  
 With lips as much too white, as a streak  
 Lay far too red on each hollow cheek ;  
 And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied  
 All that was left of a woman once,  
 Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.  
 Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,  
 With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,  
 And eyelids screwed together tight,  
 Led himself in by some inner light.  
 And, except from him, from each that entered,  
 I got the same interrogation—  
 “What, you the alien, you have ventured  
 To take with us, the elect, your station ?  
 A carer for none of it, a Gallio !”—  
 Thus, plain as print, I read the glance  
 At a common prey, in each countenance  
 As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho.  
 And, when the door’s cry drowned their wonder,  
 The draught, it always sent in shutting,  
 Made the flame of the single tallow candle  
 In the cracked square lantern I stood under,  
 Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting  
 As it were, the luckless cause of scandal :  
 I verily fancied the zealous light  
 (In the chapel’s secret, too !) for spite  
 Would shudder itself clean off the wick,  
 (2) With the airs of a Saint John’s Candlestick.

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exact meaning is difficult to read it arises chiefly from the dramatic rapidity and condensation of the thought. “The poem is full of pathos and power, full of beauty and grandeur, earnestness and truth.” There is about it that quality of the seer which makes the things depicted to stand out with an air of veritable reality.

We append the brief, convenient outline of the poem given by Mr. George Willis Cooke in his *Browning Guide-Book*:

1. Conventional religion in the little chapel : sections 1 to 3.
2. The religion of nature : sections 4 to 7.
3. Christ revealed to the soul through the supernatural : sections 8 and 9.
4. Christ as manifested at Rome in a great ecclesiastical system : sections 10 to 12.
5. Christ as interpreted by a rationalistic German professor : sections 14 and 15.
6. The poet’s communion with his own mind on the nature of the Christ : sections 16 to 19.
7. The poet’s own conception of the Christ : section 20.
8. Conclusion: Christ as the God of salvation : sections 21 and 22.

There was no standing it much longer.  
 "Good folks," thought I, as resolve grew stronger,  
 "This way you perform the Grand Inquisitor  
 When the weather sends you a chance visitor ?  
 You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,  
 And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you !  
 But still, despite the pretty perfection  
 To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness,  
 And, taking God's word under wise protection,  
 Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,  
 And bid one reach it over hot plowshares,—  
 Still, as I say, though you've found salvation,  
 If I should choose to cry, as now, 'Shares !'—  
 See if the best of you bars me my ration !  
 I prefer, if you please, for my expounder  
 Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder ;  
 Mine's the same right with your poorest and sickliest,  
 Supposing I don the marriage vestment :  
 So, shut your mouth and open your Testament,  
 And carve me my portion at your quickliest !"  
 Accordingly, as a shoemaker's lad  
 With wizened face in want of soap,  
 And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope,  
 (After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,  
 To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,  
 And so avoid disturbing the preacher)  
 —Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise  
 At the shutting door, and entered likewise,  
 Received the hinge's accustomed greeting,  
 And crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,  
 And found myself in full conventicle,  
 —To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,  
 (3) On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine,  
 Which, calling its flock to their special clover,  
 Found all assembled and one sheep over,  
 Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

## III.

I very soon had enough of it.  
 The hot smell and the human noises,  
 And my neighbor's coat, the greasy cuff of it,  
 Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,  
 Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure  
 Of the preaching man's immense stupidity,  
 As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,  
 To meet his audience's avidity.  
 You needed not the wit of the Sibyl  
 To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling :  
 No sooner our friend had got an inkling  
 Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,  
 (Whene'er 'twas the thought first struck him,  
 How death, at unawares, might duck him

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Deeper than the grave, and quench  
 The gin-shop's light in hell's grim drench)  
 Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence,  
 As to hug the book of books to pieces :  
 And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,  
 Not improved by the private dog's-ears and creases,  
 Having clothed his own soul with, he'd fain see equipt  
 yours.—

So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.  
 And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt :  
 Nay, had but a single face of my neighbors  
 Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labors  
 Were help which the world could be saved without,  
 'Tis odds but I might have borne in quiet  
 A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,  
 Or (who can tell ?) perchance even mustered  
 Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon:  
 But the flock sat on, divinely flustered,  
 Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon  
 With such content in every snuffle,  
 As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.  
 My old fat woman purred with pleasure,  
 And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,  
 While she, to his periods keeping measure,  
 Maternally devoured the pastor.  
 The man with the handkerchief untied it,  
 Showed us a horrible wen inside it,  
 Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,  
 And rocked himself as the woman was doing.  
 The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,  
 Kept down his cough. 'Twas too provoking !  
 My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it ;  
 So, saying like Eve when she plucked the apple,  
 "I wanted a taste, and now there's enough of it,"

(4) I flung out of the little chapel.

## IV.

There was a lull in the rain, a lull  
 In the wind too ; the moon was risen,  
 And would have shone out pure and full,  
 But for the rampart cloud-prison,  
 Block on block built up in the West,  
 For what purpose the wind knows best,  
 Who changes his mind continually.  
 And the empty other half of the sky  
 Seemed in its silence as if it knew  
 What, any moment, might look through  
 A chance gap in that fortress massy :—  
 Through its fissures you got hints  
 Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,  
 Now, a dull lion-color, now, brassy  
 Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,  
 Like furnace-smoke just ere flames bellow,

All a-simmer with intense strain  
 To let her through,—then blank again,  
 At the hope of her appearance failing.  
 Just by the chapel a break in the railing  
 Shows a narrow path directly across ;  
 'Tis ever dry walking there, on the moss—  
 Besides, you go gently all the way up-hill.  
 I stooped under and soon felt better ;  
 My head grew lighter, my limbs more supple,  
 As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter.  
 My mind was full of the scene I had left,  
 That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,  
 —How this outside was pure and different !  
 The sermon, now—what a mingled weft  
 Of good and ill ! Were either less,  
 Its fellow had colored the whole distinctly ;  
 But alas for the excellent earnestness,  
 And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly,  
 But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,  
 However to pastor and flock's contentment !  
 Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,  
 With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,  
 Till how could you know them, grown double their size  
 In the natural fog of the good man's mind,  
 Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps,  
 Haloed about with the common's damps ?  
 Truth remains true, the fault's in the prover ;  
 The zeal was good, and the aspiration ;  
 And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,  
 Pharaoh received no demonstration,  
 By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,  
 Of the doctrine of the Trinity,—  
 Although, as our preacher thus embellished it,  
 Apparently his hearers relished it,  
 With so unfeigned a gust—who knows if  
 They did not prefer our friend to Joseph ?  
 But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them !  
 These people have really felt, no doubt,  
 A something, the motion they style the Call of them ;  
 And this is their method of bringing about,  
 By a mechanism of words and tones,  
 (So many texts in so many groans)  
 A sort of reviving and reproducing,  
 More or less perfectly, (who can tell ?)  
 The mood itself, which strengthens by using ;  
 And how that happens, I understand well.  
 A tune was born in my head last week,  
 Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek  
 Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester ;  
 And when, next week, I take it back again,  
 My head will sing to the engine's clack again,  
 While it only makes my neighbor's haunches stir,  
 —Finding no dormant musical sprout

In him, as in me, to be jolted out.  
 'Tis the taught already that profits by teaching :  
 He gets no more from the railway's preaching  
 Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I :  
 Whom therefore the flock cast a jealous eye on.  
 Still, why paint over their door " Mount Zion,"  
 To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy ?

## V.

- But wherefore be harsh on a single case ?  
 After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,  
 Does the selfsame weary things take place ?  
 The same endeavor to make you believe,  
 And with much the same effect, no more :  
 Each method abundantly convincing,  
 As I say, to those convinced before,  
 But scarce to be swallowed without wincing  
 (5) By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,  
 I have my own church equally :  
 And in this church my faith sprang first !  
 (I said, as I reached the rising ground,  
 And the wind began again, with a burst  
 Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound  
 From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,  
 I entered his church-door, nature leading me)  
 —In youth I looked to these very skies,  
 And probing their immensities,  
 I found God there, his visible power ;  
 Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense  
 Of the power, an equal evidence  
 That his love, there too, was the nobler dower.  
 For the loving worm within its clod  
 Were diviner than a loveless god  
 Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.  
 You know what I mean : God's all, man's naught :  
 But also, God, whose pleasure brought  
 Man into being, stands away  
 As it were a handbreadth off, to give  
 Room for the newly-made to live,  
 And look at him from a place apart,  
 And use his gifts of brain and heart,  
 Given, indeed, but to keep forever.  
 Who speaks of man, then, must not sever  
 Man's very elements from man,  
 Saying, " But all is God's "—whose plan  
 Was to create man and then leave him  
 Able, his own word saith, to grieve him,  
 But able to glorify him too,  
 As a mere machine could never do,  
 That prayed or praised, all unaware  
 Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,  
 Made perfect as a thing of course.

Man, therefore, stands on his own stock  
 Of love and power as a pin-point rock :  
 And, looking to God who ordained divorce  
 Of the rock from his boundless continent,  
 Sees, in his power made evident,  
 Only excess by a million-fold  
 O'er the power God gave man in the mould.  
 For, note : man's hand, first formed to carry  
 A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry  
 Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain,  
 —Advancing in power by one degree ;  
 And why count steps through eternity ?  
 But love is the ever-springing fountain :  
 Man may enlarge or narrow his bed  
 For the water's play, but the water-head—  
 How can he multiply or reduce it ?  
 As easy create it, as cause it to cease ;  
 He may profit by it, or abuse it,  
 But 'tis not a thing to bear increase  
 As power does : be love less or more  
 In the heart of man, he keeps it shut  
 Or opes it wide, as he pleases, but  
 Love's sum remains what it was before.  
 So, gazing up, in my youth, at love  
 As seen through power, ever above  
 All modes which make it manifest,  
 My soul brought all to a single test—  
 That he, the Eternal First and Last,  
 Who, in his power, had so surpassed  
 All man conceives of what is might,—  
 Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,  
 —Would prove as infinitely good ;  
 Would never, (my soul understood,)  
 With power to work all love desires,  
 Bestow e'en less than man requires ;  
 That he who endlessly was teaching,  
 Above my spirit's utmost reaching,  
 What love can do in the leaf or stone,  
 (So that to master this alone,  
 This done in the stone or leaf for me,  
 I must go on learning endlessly)  
 Would never need that I, in turn,  
 Should point him out defect unheeded,  
 And show that God had yet to learn  
 What the meanest human creature needed,  
 —Not life, to wit, for a few short years,  
 Tracking his way through doubts and fears,  
 While the stupid earth on which I stay  
 Suffers no change, but passive adds  
 Its myriad years to myriads,  
 Though I, he gave it to, decay,  
 Seeing death come and choose about me,  
 And my dearest ones depart without me.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

No : love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,  
 Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it.  
 The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,  
 Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it.  
 And I shall behold thee, face to face,  
 O God, and in thy light retrace  
 How in all I loved here, still wast thou !  
 Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,  
 I shall find as able to satiate  
 The love, thy gift, as my spirit's wonder  
 Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,  
 With this sky of thine, that I now walk under  
 And glory in thee for, as I gaze  
 Thus, thus ! O, let men keep their ways—  
 Of seeking thee in a narrow shrine—  
 Be this my way ! And this is mine !

## VI.

For lo, what think you ? suddenly  
 The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky  
 Received at once the full fruition  
 Of the moon's consummate apparition.  
 The black cloud-harricade was riven,  
 Ruined beneath her feet, and driven  
 Deep in the West ; while, bare and breathless,  
 North and South and East lay ready  
 For a glorious thing that, dauntless, deathless,  
 Sprang across them and stood steady.  
 'Twas a moon rainbow, vast and perfect,  
 From heaven to heaven extending, perfect  
 As the mother-moon's self, full in face.  
 It rose, distinctly at the base  
 With its seven proper colors chorded,  
 Which still, in the rising, were compressed,  
 Until at last they coalesced,  
 And supreme the spectral creature lorded  
 In a triumph of whitest white,—  
 Above which intervened the night.  
 But above night too, like only the next,  
 The second of a wondrous sequence,  
 Reaching in rare and rarer frequence,  
 Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,  
 Another rainbow rose, a mightier,  
 Fainter, flushier and flightier,—  
 Rapture dying along its verge.  
 O, whose foot shall I see emerge,  
 Whose, from the straining topmost dark,  
 On to the keystone of that arc ?

(6)

## VII.

This sight was shown me, there and then,—  
 Me, one out of a world of men,

Singled forth, as the chance might hap  
 To another if, in a thunderclap  
 Where I heard noise and you saw flame,  
 Some one man knew God called his name.  
 For me, I think I said, " Appear !  
 Good were it to be ever here.  
 If thou wilt, let me build to thee  
 Service-tabernacles three,  
 Where, forever in thy presence,  
 In ecstatic acquiescence,  
 Far alike from thirstless learning  
 And ignorance's undiscerning,  
 I may worship and remain ! "  
 Thus at the show above me, gazing  
 With upturned eyes, I felt my brain  
 Glutted with the glory, blazing  
 Throughout its whole mass, over and under,  
 Until at length it burst asunder  
 And out of it bodily there streamed,  
 The too-much glory, as it seemed,  
 Passing from out me to the ground,  
 Then palely serpentine round  
 Into the dark with mazy error.

## VIII.

All at once I looked up with terror.  
 He was there.  
 He himself with his human air,  
 On the narrow pathway, just before.  
 I saw the back of him, no more—  
 He had left the chapel, then, as I.  
 I forgot all about the sky.  
 No face : only the sight  
 Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,  
 With a hem that I could recognize.  
 I felt terror, no surprise ;  
 My mind filled with the cataract  
 At one bound of the mighty fact.  
 " I remember, he did say  
 Doubtless that, to this world's end,  
 Where two or three should meet and pray,  
 He would be in the midst, their friend ;  
 Certainly he was there with them ! "  
 And my pulses leaped for joy  
 Of the golden thought without alloy,  
 That I saw his very vesture's hem.  
 Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear,  
 With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear ;  
 And I hastened, cried out while I pressed  
 To the salvation of the vest,  
 " But not so, Lord ! It cannot be  
 That thou, indeed, art leaving me—

Me, that have despised thy friends !  
 Did my heart make no amends ?  
 Thou art the love of God—above  
 His power, didst hear me place his love,  
 And that was leaving the world for thee.  
 Therefore thou must not turn from me  
 As I had chosen the other part !  
 Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.  
 Our best is bad, nor bears thy test ;  
 Still, it should be our very best.  
 I thought it best that thou, the spirit,  
 Be worshiped in spirit and in truth,  
 And in beauty, as even we require it—  
 Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,  
 I left but now, as scarcely fitted  
 For thee : I knew not what I pitied.  
 But, all I felt there, right or wrong,  
 What is it to thee, who curest sinning ?  
 Am I not weak as thou art strong ?  
 I have looked to thee from the beginning,  
 Straight up to thee through all the world  
 Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled  
 To nothingness on either side:  
 And since the time thou wast descried,  
 Spite of the weak heart, so have I  
 Lived ever, and so fain would die,  
 Living and dying, thee before !  
 But if thou leavest me"—

## IX.

## Less or more,

I suppose that I spoke thus.  
 When,—have mercy, Lord, on us !  
 The whole face turned upon me full.  
 And I spread myself beneath it,  
 As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it  
 In the cleansing sun, his wool,—  
 Steeps in the flood of noon tide whiteness  
 Some defiled, discolored web—  
 So lay I, saturate with brightness,  
 And when the flood appeared to ebb,  
 Lo, I was walking, light and swift,  
 With my senses settling fast and steadyng,  
 But my body caught up in the whirl and drift  
 Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying  
 On, just before me, still to be followed,  
 As it carried me after with its emotion :  
 What shall I say ?—as a path were hollowed  
 And a man went weltering through the ocean,  
 Sucked along in the flying wake  
 Of the luminous water-snake.  
 Darkness and cold were cloven, as through  
 I passed, upborne yet walking too.

And I turned to myself at intervals,—  
 “So he said, so it befalls.  
 God who registers the cup  
 Of mere cold water, for his sake  
 To a disciple rendered up,  
 Disdains not his own thirst to slake  
 At the poorest love was ever offered :  
 And because my heart I proffered,  
 With true love trembling at the brim,  
 He suffers me to follow him  
 Forever, my own way,—dispensed  
 From seeking to be influenced  
 By all the less immediate ways  
 That earth, in worships manifold,  
 Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,  
 The garment’s hem, which, lo, I hold !”

## X.

And so we crossed the world and stopped.  
 For where am I, in city or plain,  
 Since I am ‘ware of the world again ?  
 And what is this that rises propped  
 With pillars of prodigious girth ?  
 Is it really on the earth,  
 This miraculous Dome of God ?  
 Has the angel’s measuring-rod  
 Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,  
 ’Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,  
 Meted it out,—and what he meted,  
 Have the sons of men completed ?  
 —Binding, ever as he bade,  
 Columns in the colonnade  
 With arms wide open to embrace  
 The entry of the human race  
 To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,  
 Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,  
 With marble for brick, and stones of price  
 For garniture of the edifice ?  
 Now I see ; it is no dream ;  
 It stands there and it does not seem :  
 Forever, in pictures, thus it looks,  
 And thus I have read of it in books  
 Often in England, leagues away,  
 And wondered how these fountains play,  
 Growing up eternally  
 Each to a musical water-tree,  
 Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,  
 Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,  
 To the granite lawers underneath.  
 Liar and dreamer in your teeth !  
 I, the sinner that speak to you,  
 Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew

Both this and more. For see, for see,  
 The dark is rent, mine eye is free  
 To pierce the crust of the outer wall,  
 And I view inside, and all there, all,  
 As the swarming hollow of a hive,  
 The whole Basilica alive !  
 Men in the chancel, body and nave,  
 Men on the pillars' architrave,  
 Men on the statues, men on the tombs  
 With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,  
 All famishing in expectation  
 Of the main altar's consummation.  
 For see, for see, the rapturous moment  
 Approaches, and earth's best endowment  
 Blends with heaven's ; the taper-fires  
 Pant up, the winding brazen spires  
 (7) Heave loftier yet the baldachin ;  
 The incense-gasplings, long kept in,  
 Suspire in clouds ; the organ blatant  
 Holds his breath and grovels latent,  
 As if God's hushing finger grazed him,  
 (Like Behemoth when he praised him)  
 At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,  
 Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling  
 On the sudden pavement strewed  
 With faces of the multitude.  
 Earth breaks up, time drops away,  
 In flows heaven, with its new day  
 Of endless life, when He who trod,  
 Very man and very God,  
 This earth in weakness, shame and pain,  
 Dying the death whose signs remain  
 Up yonder on the accursed tree,—  
 Shall come again, no more to be  
 Of captivity the thrall,  
 But the one God, All in all,  
 King of kings, Lord of lords,  
 As his servant John received the words,  
 "I died, and live forevermore!"

## XL

Yet I was left outside the door.  
 "Why sit I here on the threshold-stone,  
 Left till He return, alone  
 Save for the garment's extreme fold  
 Abandoned still to bless my hold?"  
 My reason, to my doubt, replied,  
 As if a book were opened wide,  
 And at a certain page I traced  
 Every record undefaced,  
 Added by successive years,—  
 The harvestings of truth's stray ears

Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf  
 Bound together for belief.  
 Yes, I said—that he will go  
 And sit with these in turn, I know.  
 Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims  
 Too giddily to guide her limbs,  
 Disabled by their palsy-stroke  
 From propping mine. Though Rome's gross yoke  
 Drops off, no more to be endured,  
 Her teaching is not so obscured  
 By errors and perversities,  
 That no truth shines athwart the lies :  
 And he, whose eye detects a spark  
 Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark,  
 May well see flame where each beholder  
 Acknowledges the embers smoulder.  
 But I, a mere man, fear to quit  
 The clue God gave me as most fit  
 To guide my footsteps through life's maze,  
 Because himself discerns all ways  
 Open to reach him : I, a man  
 Able to mark where faith began  
 To swerve aside, till from its summit  
 Judgment drops her damning plummet,  
 Pronouncing such a fatal space  
 Departed from the founder's base :  
 He will not bid me enter too,  
 But rather sit, as now I do,  
 Awaiting his return outside.

—'Twas thus my reason straight replied  
 And joyously I turned, and pressed  
 The garment's skirt upon my breast,  
 Until, afresh its light suffusing me,  
 My heart cried—"What has been abusing me  
 That I should wait here lonely and coldly,  
 Instead of rising, entering boldly,  
 Baring truth's face, and letting drift  
 Her veils of lies as they choose to shift ?  
 Do these men praise him ? I will raise  
 My voice up to their point of praise !  
 I see the error ; but above

The scope of error, see the love.—

(8) O, love of those first Christian days !

—Fanned so soon into a blaze,  
 From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,  
 That the antique sovereign Intellect  
 Which then sat ruling in the world,  
 Like a change in dreams, was hurled  
 From the throne he reigned upon :  
 You looked up and he was gone.  
 Gone, his glory of the pen !  
 —Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,  
 Bade her scribes abhor the trick

Of poetry and rhetoric,  
 And exalt with hearts set free,  
 In blessed imbecility  
 Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet  
 Leaving Sallust incomplete.  
 Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter !  
 —Love, while able to acquaint her  
 While the thousand statues yet  
 Fresh from chisel, pictures wet  
 From brush, she saw on every side,  
 Chose rather with an infant's pride  
 To frame those portents which impart  
 Such unction to true Christian Art.  
 Gone, music too ! The air was stirred  
 (9) By happy wings : Terpander's bird  
 (That, when the cold came, fled away)  
 Would tarry not the wintry day,—  
 As more-enduring sculpture must,  
 Till filthy saints rebuked the gust  
 With which they chanced to get a sight  
 Of some dear naked Aphrodite  
 They glanced a thought above the toes of,  
 By breaking zealously her nose off.  
 Love, surely, from that music's lingering,  
 Might have filched her organ-fingering,  
 Nor chosen rather to set praysings  
 To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.  
 Love was the startling thing, the new :  
 Love was the all-sufficient too ;  
 And seeing that, you see the rest :  
 As a babe can find its mother's breast  
 As well in darkness as in light,  
 Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.  
 True, the world's eyes are open now :  
 —Less need for me to disallow  
 Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled,  
 Peevish as ever to be suckled,  
 Lulled by the same old baby-prattle  
 With intermixture of the rattle,  
 When she would have them creep, stand steady  
 Upon their feet, or walk already,  
 Not to speak of trying to climb.  
 I will be wise another time,  
 And not desire a wall between us,  
 When next I see a church-roof cover  
 So many species of one genus,  
 All with foreheads bearing *lover*  
 Written above the earnest eyes of them ;  
 All with breasts that beat for beauty,  
 Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them  
 In noble daring, steadfast duty,  
 The heroic in passion, or in action,—  
 Or, lowered for sense's satisfaction,

To the mere outside of human creatures,  
 Mere perfect form and faultless features.  
 What? with all Rome here, whence to levy  
 Such contributions to their appetite,  
 With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,  
 They take, as it were, a padlock, clap it tight  
 On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding  
 On the glories of their ancient reading,  
 On the beauties of their modern singing,  
 On the wonders of the builder's bringing,  
 On the majesties of Art around them,—  
 And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,  
 When faith has at last united and bound them,  
 They offer up to God for a present?  
 Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it.—  
 And, only taking the act in reference  
 To the other recipients who might have allowed it,  
 I will rejoice that God had the preference."

## XII.

So I summed up my new resolves :  
 Too much love there can never be.  
 And where the intellect devolves  
 Its function on love exclusively,  
 I, a man who possesses both,  
 Will accept the provision, nothing loth,  
 —Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,  
 That my intellect may find its share.  
 And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,  
 And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist,  
 Who, examining the capabilities  
 Of the block of marble he has to fashion  
 Into a type of thought or passion,—  
 Not always, using obvious facilities,  
 Shapes it, as any artist can,  
 Into a perfect symmetrical man,  
 Complete from head to foot of the life-size,  
 Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—  
 But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate  
 A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,  
 And uses the whole of his block for the bust,  
 Leaving the mind of the public to finish it,  
 Since cut it ruefully short he must :  
 On the face alone he expends his devotion,  
 He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,  
 —Saying, " Applaud me for this grand notion  
 Of what a face may be ! As for completing it  
 In breast and body and limbs, do that, you ! "  
 All hail ! I fancy how, happily meeting it,  
 A trunk and legs would perfect the statue,  
 Could man carve so as to answer volition.  
 And how much nobler than petty cavils,

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Were a hope to find, in my spirit-travels,  
 Some artist of another ambition,  
 Who having a block to carve, no bigger,  
 Has spent his power on the opposite quest,  
 And believed to begin at the feet was best—  
 (10) For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure !

## XIII.

No sooner said than out in the night !  
 My heart beat lighter and more light :  
 And still, as before, I was walking swift,  
 With my senses settling fast and steadyng,  
 But my body caught up in the whirl and drift  
 Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying  
 On, just before me, still to be followed,  
 As it carried me after with its motion :  
 What shall I say ?—as a path were hollowed,  
 And a man went weltering through the ocean,  
 Sucked along in the flying wake  
 Of the luminous water-snake.

## XIV.

Alone ! I am left alone once more—  
 (Save for the garment's extreme fold  
 Abandoned still to bless my hold)  
 Alone, beside the entrance-door  
 Of a sort of temple—perhaps a college,  
 —Like nothing I ever saw before  
 At home in England, to my knowledge.  
 The tall old quaint irregular town !  
 It may be . . . though which, I can't affirm . . . any  
 Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany ;  
 And this flight of stairs where I sit down,  
 Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, Frankfort,  
 Or Göttingen, I have to thank for 't ?  
 It may be Göttingen,—most likely.  
 Through the open door I catch obliquely  
 Glimpses of a lecture-hall ;  
 And not a bad assembly neither,  
 Ranged decent and symmetrical  
 On benches, waiting what's to see there ;  
 Which, holding still by the vesture's hem,  
 I also resolve to see with them,  
 Cautious this time how I suffer to slip  
 The chance of joining in fellowship  
 With any that call themselves his friends ;  
 As these folks do, I have a notion.  
 But hist—a buzzing and emotion !  
 All settle themselves, the while ascends  
 By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,  
 Step by step, deliberate  
 Because of his cranium's over-freight,

Three parts sublime to one grotesque,  
 If I have proved an accurate guesser,  
 The hawk-nosed, high-cheekboned Professor.  
 I felt at once as if there ran  
 A shoot of love from my heart to the man—  
 That sallow virgin-minded studious  
 Martyr to mild enthusiasm,  
 As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious  
 That woke my sympathetic spasm,  
 (Beside some spitting that made me sorry)  
 And stood, surveying his auditory  
 With a wan pure look, wellnigh celestial,—  
 Those blue eyes had survived so much !  
 While, under the foot they could not smutch,  
 Lay all the fleshly and the bestial.  
 Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,  
 Till the auditory's clearing of throats  
 Was done with, died in a silence;  
 And, when each glance was upward sent,  
 Each bearded mouth composed intent,  
 And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence,—  
 He pushed back higher his spectacles,  
 Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells.  
 And giving his head of hair—a hake  
 Of undressed tow, for color and quantity—  
 One rapid and impatient shake,  
 (As our own young England adjusts a jaunty tie  
 When about to impart, on mature digestion,  
 Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)  
 —The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,  
 Broke into his Christmas-Eve discourse.

## XV.

And he began it by observing  
 How reason dictated that men  
 Should rectify the natural swerving,  
 By a reversion, now and then,  
 To the well-heads of knowledge, few  
 And far away, whence rolling grew  
 The life-stream wide whereat we drink,  
 Commingled, as we needs must think,  
 With waters alien to the source ;  
 To do which, aimed this eve's discourse ;  
 Since, where could be a fitter time  
 For tracing backward to its prime,  
 This Christianity, this lake,  
 This reservoir, whereat we slake,  
 From one or other bank, our thirst ?  
 So, he proposed inquiring first  
 Into the various sources whence  
 This Myth of Christ is derivable ;  
 Demanding from the evidence,  
 (Since plainly no such life was livable)

How these phenomena should class ?  
 Whether 'twere best opine Christ was,  
 Or never was at all, or whether  
 (ii) He was and was not, both together—  
 It matters little for the name,  
 So the idea be left the same.  
 Only, for practical purpose' sake,  
 'Twas obviously as well to take  
 The popular story,—understanding  
 How the ineptitude of the time,  
 And the penman's prejudice, expanding  
 Fact into fable fit for the clime,  
 Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it  
 Into this myth, this Individuum,—  
 Which when reason had strained and abated it  
 Of foreign matter, left, for residuum,  
 A Man !—a right true man, however,  
 Whose work was worthy a man's endeavor :  
 Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient  
 To his disciples, for rather believing  
 He was just omnipotent and omniscient,  
 As it gives to us, for frankly receiving  
 His word, their tradition,—which, though it meant  
 Something entirely different  
 From all that those who only heard it,  
 In their simplicity thought and averred it,  
 Had yet a meaning quite as respectable :  
 For, among other doctrines delectable,  
 Was he not surely the first to insist on  
 The natural sovereignty of our race ?—  
 Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.  
 And while his cough, like a droughty piston,  
 Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,  
 I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him,  
 The vesture still within my hand.

## XVI.

I could interpret its command.  
 This time he would not bid me enter  
 The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.  
 Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic  
 When Papist struggles with Dissenter,  
 Impregnating its pristine clarity,  
 —One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,  
 Its gusts of broken meat and garlic ;  
 —One, by his soul's too much presuming  
 To turn the frankincense's fuming  
 And vapors of the candle star-like  
 Into the cloud her wings she buoys on.  
 Each, that thus sets the pure air seething,  
 May poison it for healthy breathing—  
 But the Critic leaves no air to poison ;

Pumps out with ruthless ingenuity  
 Atom by atom, and leaves you—vacuity.  
 Thus much of Christ does he reject ?  
 And what retain ? His intellect ?  
 What is it I must reverence duly ?  
 Poor intellect for worship, truly,  
 Which tells me simply what was told  
 (If mere morality, bereft  
 Of the God in Christ, be all that's left)  
 Elsewhere by voices manifold ;  
 With this advantage, that the stater  
 Made nowise the important stumble  
 Of adding, he, the sage and humble,  
 Was also one with the Creator.  
 You urge Christ's followers' simplicity :  
 But how does shifting blame evade it ?  
 Have wisdom's words no more felicity ?  
 The stumbling-block, his speech—who laid it ?  
 How comes it that for one found able  
 To sift the truth of it from fable,  
 Millions believe it to the letter ?  
 Christ's goodness, then—does that fare better ?  
 Strange goodness, which upon the score  
 Of being goodness, the mere due  
 Of man to fellow-man, much more  
 To God—should take another view  
 Of its possessor's privilege,  
 And bid him rule his race ! You pledge  
 Your fealty to such rule ? What, all—  
 From heavenly John and Attic Paul,  
 And that brave weather-battered Peter,  
 Whose stout faith only stood completer  
 For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,  
 As, more his hands hauled nets, they hardened,—  
 All, down to you, the man of men,  
 Professing here at Göttingen,  
 Compose Christ's flock ! They, you and I,  
 Are sheep of a good man ! And why ?  
 The goodness,—how did he acquire it ?  
 Was it self-gained, did God inspire it ?  
 Choose which ; then tell me, on what ground  
 Should its possessor dare propound  
 His claims to rise o'er us an inch ?  
 Were goodness all some man's invention,  
 Who arbitrarily made mention  
 What we should follow, and whence flinch,—  
 What qualities might take the style  
 Of right and wrong,—and had such guessing  
 Met with as general acquiescing  
 As graced the alphabet erewhile,  
 (12) When A got leave an Ox to be,  
 No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G,—  
 For thus inventing thing and title

Worship were that man's fit requital.  
 But if the common conscience must  
 Be ultimately judge, adjust  
 Its apt name to each quality  
 Already known,—I would decree  
 Worship for such mere demonstration  
 And simple work of nomenclature,  
 Only the day I praised, not nature,  
 But Harvey, for the circulation.  
 I would praise such a Christ, with pride  
 And joy, that he, as none beside,  
 Had taught us how to keep the mind  
 God gave him, as God gave his kind,  
 Freer than they from fleshly taint :  
 I would call such a Christ our Saint,  
 As I declare our Poet, him  
 Whose insight makes all others dim :  
 A thousand poets pried at life,  
 And only one amid the strife  
 Rose to be Shakespeare : each shall take  
 His crown, I'd say, for the world's sake—  
 Though some objected—"Had we seen  
 The heart and head of each, what screen  
 Was broken there to give them light,  
 While in ourselves it shuts the sight,  
 We should no more admire, perchance,  
 That these found truth out at a glance,  
 Than marvel how the bat discerns  
 Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,  
 Led by a finer tact, a gift  
 He boasts, which other birds must shift  
 Without, and grope as best they can."  
 No, freely I would praise the man,—  
 Nor one whit more, if he contended  
 That gift of his from God descended.  
 Ah friend, what gift of man's does not ?  
 No nearer something, by a jot,  
 Rise an infinity of nothings  
 Than one : take Euclid for your teacher:  
 Distinguish kinds : do crownings, clothings,  
 Make that creator which was creature?  
 Multiply gifts upon man's head,  
 And what, when all's done, shall be said  
 But—the more gifted he, I ween !  
 That one's made Christ, this other, Pilate,  
 And this might be all that has been,—  
 So what is there to frown or smile at?  
 What is left for us, save, in growth  
 Of soul, to rise up, far past both,  
 From the gift looking to the giver,  
 And from the cistern to the river,  
 And from the finite to infinity,  
 And from man's dust to God's divinity ?

## XVII.

Take all in a word : the truth in God's breast  
 Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed :  
 Though he is so bright and we so dim,  
 We are made in his image to witness him :  
 And were no eye in us to tell,  
 Instructed by no inner sense,  
 The light of heaven from the dark of hell,  
 That light would want its evidence,—  
 Though justice, good and truth were still  
 Divine, if, by some demon's will,  
 Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed  
 Law through the worlds, and right misnamed.  
 No mere exposition of morality  
 Made or in part or in totality,  
 Should win you to give it worship, therefore :  
 And, if no better proof you will care for,  
 —Whom do you count the worst man upon earth ?  
 Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more  
 Of what right is, than arrives at birth  
 In the best man's acts that we bow before :  
 This last knows better—true, but my fact is,  
 'Tis one thing to know, and another to practice.  
 And thence I conclude that the real God-function  
 Is to furnish a motive and injunction  
 For practising what we know already.  
 And such an injunction and such a motive  
 As the God in Christ, do you waive, and "heady,  
 High-minded," hang your tablet-votive  
 Outside the fane on a finger-post ?  
 Morality to the uttermost,  
 Supreme in Christ as we all confess,  
 Why need we prove would avail no jot  
 To make him God, if God he were not ?  
 What is the point where himself lays stress ?  
 Does the precept run " Believe in good,  
 In justice, truth, now understood  
 (13) For the first time "?—or, " Believe in me,  
 Who lived and died, yet essentially  
 Am Lord of Life "? Whoever can take  
 The same to his heart and for mere love's sake  
 Conceive of the love,—that man obtains  
 A new truth ; no conviction gains  
 Of an old one only, made intense  
 By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

## XVIII.

Can it be that he stays inside ?  
 Is the vesture left me to commune with ?  
 Could my soul find ought to sing in tune with  
 Even at this lecture, if she tried ?  
 O, let me at lowest sympathize

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

With the lurking drop of blood that lies  
 In the dessicated brain's white roots  
 Without throb for Christ's attributes,  
 As the lecturer makes his special boast !  
 If love's dead there, it has left a ghost.  
 Admire we, how from heart to brain  
 (Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)  
 One instinct rises and falls again,  
 Restoring the equilibrium.  
 And how when the Critic had done his best,  
 And the pearl of price, at reason's test,  
 Lay dust and ashes levigable  
 On the Professor's lecture-table,—  
 When we looked for the inference and monition  
 That our faith, reduced to such condition,  
 Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—  
 He bids us, when we least expect it,  
 Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,  
 Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it,  
 Which fact pays damage done rewardingly,  
 So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly !  
 "Go home and venerate the myth  
 I thus have experimented with—  
 This man, continue to adore him  
 Rather than all who went before him,  
 And all who ever followed after!"—  
 Surely for this I may praise you, my brother!  
 Will you take the praise in tears or laughter?  
 That's one point gained : can I compass another?  
 Unlearned love was safe from spurning—  
 Can't we respect your loveless learning ?  
 Let us at least give learning honor !  
 What laurels had we showered upon her,  
 Girding her loins up to perturb  
 Our theory of the Middle Verb ;  
 Or Turk-like brandishing a scimitar  
 O'er anapæsts in comic-trimeter ;  
 Or curing the halt and maimed "Iketides,"  
 While we lounged on at our indebted ease :  
 Instead of which, a tricksy demon  
 Sets her at Titus or Philemon !  
 When ignorance wags his ears of leather  
 And hates God's word, 'tis altogether ;  
 Nor leaves he his congenial thistles  
 To go and browse on Paul's Epistles.  
 —And you, the audience, who might ravage  
 The world wide, enviably savage,  
 Nor heed the cry of the retriever,  
 More than Herr Heine (before his fever),—  
 I do not tell a lie so arrant  
 As say my passion's wings are furled up,  
 And, without plainest heavenly warrant,  
 I were ready and glad to give the world up—

(14)

- But still, when you rub brow meticulous,  
 And ponder the profit of turning holy  
 If not for God's, for your own sake solely,  
 —God forbid I should find you ridiculous !  
 Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,  
 Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,  
 (15) "Christians," abhor the deist's pravity,—  
 Go on, you shall no more move my gravity  
 Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse,  
 I find it in my heart to embarrass them  
 By hinting that their stick's a mock horse,  
 And they really carry what they say carries them.

## XIX.

So sat I talking with my mind.  
 I did not long to leave the door  
 And find a new church, as before,  
 But rather was quiet and inclined  
 To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting  
 From further tracking and trying and testing.  
 "This tolerance is a genial mood!"  
 (Said I, and a little pause ensued.)  
 "One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,  
 And sees, each side, the good effects of it,  
 A value for religion's self,  
 A carelessness about the sects of it.  
 Let me enjoy my own conviction,  
 Not watch my neighbor's faith with fretfulness,  
 Still spying there some dereliction  
 Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!  
 Better a mild indifferentism,  
 Teaching that both our faiths (though duller  
 His shine through a dull spirit's prism)  
 Originally had one color!  
 Better pursue a pilgrimage  
 Through ancient and through modern times  
 To many peoples, various climes,  
 Where I may see saint, savage, sage  
 Fuse their respective creeds in one  
 Before the general Father's throne!"

## XX.

—'Twas the horrible storm began afresh !  
 The black night caught me in his mesh,  
 Whirled me up, and flung me prone.  
 I was left on the college-step alone.  
 I looked, and far there, ever fleeting  
 Far, far away, the receding gesture,  
 And looming of the lessening vesture!—  
 Swept forward from my stupid hand,  
 While I watched my foolish heart expand

- (16) In the lazy glow of benevolence,  
 O'er the various modes of man's belief.  
 I sprang up with fear's vehemence.  
 Needs must there be one way, our chief  
 Best way of worship: let me strive  
 To find it, and when found, contrive  
 My fellows also take their share!  
 This constitutes my earthly care:  
 God's is above it and distinct,  
 For I, a man, with men am linked  
 And not a brute with brutes; no gain  
 That I experience, must remain  
 Unshared: but should my best endeavor  
 To share it, fail—subsisteth ever  
 God's care above, and I exult  
 That God, by God's own ways occult,  
 May—doth, I will believe—bring back  
 All wanderers to a single track.  
 Meantime, I can but testify  
 God's care for me—no more, can I—  
 It is but for myself I know;  
 The world rolls witnessing around me  
 Only to leave me as it found me;  
 Men cry there, but my ear is slow:  
 Their races flourish or decay  
 —What boots it; while yon lucid way  
 Loaded with stars divides the vault?  
 But soon my soul repairs its fault  
 When, sharpening sense's hebetude,  
 She turns on my own life! So viewed,  
 No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense  
 With witnessings of providence:  
 And woe to me if when I look  
 Upon that record, the sole book  
 Unsealed to me, I take no heed  
 Of any warning that I read!  
 Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,  
 God's own hand did the rainbow weave,  
 Whereby the truth from heaven slid  
 Into my soul?—I cannot bid  
 The world admit he stooped to heal  
 My soul, as if in a thunder-peal  
 Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,  
 I only knew he named my name:  
 (17) But what is the world to me, for sorrow  
 Or joy in its censure, when to-morrow  
 It drops the remark, with just-turned head,  
 Then, on again, "That man is dead"?  
 Yes, but for me—my name called,—drawn  
 As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,  
 He has dipt into on a battle-dawn:  
 Bid out of life by a nod, a glance,—  
 Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance,—

With a rapid finger circled round,  
 Fixed to the first poor inch of ground  
 To fight from, where his foot was found ;  
 Whose ear but a minute since lay free  
 To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry—  
 Summoned, a solitary man,  
 To end his life where his life began,  
 From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van !  
 Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held  
 By the hem of the vesture !—

## XXI.

And I caught

At the flying robe, and unrepelled  
 Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught  
 With warmth and wonder and delight,  
 God's mercy being infinite.  
 For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,  
 When, at a passionate bound, I sprung  
 Out of the wondering world of rain,  
 Into the little chapel again.

## XXII.

How else was I found there, bolt upright  
 On my bench, as if I had never left it ?  
 —Never flung out on the common at night,  
 Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,  
 Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,  
 Or the laboratory of the Professor !  
 For the Vision, that was true, I wist,  
 True as that heaven and earth exist.  
 There sat my friend, the yellow and tall,  
 With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place ;  
 Yet my nearest neighbor's cheek showed gall.  
 She had slid away a contemptuous space :  
 And the old fat woman, late so placable,  
 Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakable,  
 Of her milk of kindness turning rancid.  
 In short, a spectator might have fancied  
 That I had nodded, betrayed by slumber,  
 Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,  
 Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,  
 And woke up now at the tenth and lastly.  
 But again, could such disgrace have happened ?  
 Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it ;  
 And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end ?  
 Unless I heard it, could I have judged it ?  
 Could I report as I do at the close,  
 First, the preacher speaks through his nose :  
 Second, his gesture is too emphatic :  
 Thirdly, to waive what's pedagogic,  
 The subject-matter itself lacks logic :

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Fourthly, the English is ungrammatic.  
 Great news ! the preacher is found no Pascal,  
 Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call  
 Of making square to a finite eye  
 The circle of infinity,  
 And find so all-but-just-succeeding !  
 Great news ! the sermon proves no reading  
 Where bee-like in the flowers I bury me,  
 Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy !  
 And now that I know the very worst of him,  
 What was it I thought to obtain at first of him ?  
 Ha ! Is God mocked, as he asks ?  
 Shall I take on me to change his tasks,  
 And dare, dispatched to a river-head  
 For a simple draught of the element,  
 Neglect the thing for which he sent,  
 And return with another thing instead ?—  
 Saying, “ Because the water found  
 Welling up from underground,  
 Is mingled with the taints of earth,  
 While thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,  
 And couldst, at wink or word, convulse  
 The world with a leap of a river-pulse,—  
 Therefore I turned from the oozings muddy,  
 And bring thee a chalice I found, instead :  
 See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy !

(18) One would suppose that the marble bled.  
 What matters the water ? A hope I have nursed :  
 The waterless cup will quench my thirst.”  
 —Better have knelt at the poorest stream  
 That trickles in pain from the straitest rift !  
 For the less or the more is all God’s gift,  
 Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite seam.  
 And here, is there water or not, to drink ?  
 I then, in ignorance and weakness,  
 Taking God’s help, have attained to think  
 My heart does best to receive in meekness  
 That mode of worship, as most to his mind,  
 Where earthly aids being cast behind,  
 His All in All appears serene  
 With the thinnest human veil between,  
 Letting the mystic lamps, the seven,  
 The many motions of his spirit,  
 Pass, as they list, to earth from heaven.  
 For the preacher’s merit or demerit,  
 It were to be wished the flaws were fewer  
 In the earthen vessel, holding treasure  
 Which lies as safe in a golden ewer ;  
 But the main thing is, does it hold good measure ?—  
 Heaven soon sets right all other matters !—  
 Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,  
 This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,  
 This soul at struggle with insanity,

Who thence take comfort—can I doubt?—  
 Which an empire gained, were a loss without.  
 May it be mine! And let us hope  
 That no worse blessing befall the Pope,

Turned sick at last of to-day's buffoonery,  
 Of posturings and petticoatings,

(19) Beside his Bourbon bully's gloatings  
 In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery!

Nor may the Professor forego its peace  
 At Göttingen presently, when, in the dusk  
 Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,

Prophesied of by that horrible husk—

When thicker and thicker the darkness fills  
 The world through his misty spectacles,

And he gropes for something more substantial  
 Than a fable, myth or personification,—

May Christ do for him what no mere man shall,

And stand confessed as the God of salvation!

Meantime, in the still recurring fear

Lest myself, at unawares, be found,

While attacking the choice of my neighbors round,

With none of my own made—I choose here!

The giving out of the hymn reclaims me;

I have done: and if any blames me,

Thinking that merely to touch in brevity

The topics I dwell on, were unlawful,—

Or worse, that I trench, with undue levity,

On the bounds of the holy and the awful,—

I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,

And refer myself to THEE, instead of him,

Who head and heart alike discernest,

(20) Looking below light speech we utter,

When frothy spume and frequent sputter

Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!

May truth shine out, stand ever before us!

I put up pencil and join chorus

To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,

The last five verses of the third section

Of the seventeenth hymn of Whitefield's Collection,

To conclude with the doxology.

#### NOTES.

- (1) Since the last line but one of the poem speaks of *Whitefield's Collection* as the hymnal used, "the little chapel" would seem to be identified as belonging to the Calvinistic Methodists. It will be noted that the first line of the fourth section takes up the story where the second line of the first section leaves it. All that lies between is a parenthesis recounting certain experiences at the chapel. The first personal pronoun is used, but the utterances are not therefore to be regarded as in all cases Mr. Browning's own—rather as proceeding from an imaginary person who is feeling his way to the truth.

(2) The reference is, of course, to Rev. i, 12, 20. Also above, in the matter of Gallio, to Acts xviii, 17.

(3) The Christmas-Eve of '49 fell on a Monday, as a matter of fact. But the verisimilitude of the poem might, perhaps, be better carried out if it were considered as coinciding with Sunday night. Otherwise would the worshipers at "Zion Chapel" be likely to pay it much attention?

(4) Let the devout reader not be disturbed at this graphic and apparently contemptuous description of the bad smells and uncouth noises of the chapel, the ranting of the preacher, the snuffling of the people, as though evangelical nonconformity were sweepingly stigmatized. The poet makes it all right in the twenty-second section, where, waking up from what appears to have been only a dream, he gives the ignorant worshipers full credit for having the water of life, though the cup be rude and the taste earthy; he elects to cast in his lot with them.

(5) Freed from the uncongenial constraint of the chapel, the speaker takes a more tolerant view of what he has heard, but is glad to be out in the free air, where nature is his church and teacher, and joyfully surrenders himself to the religious influences of solitude and night. His spirit overflows with delight and expresses itself in a beautiful rhapsody about the pervasiveness and supremacy of love, both in the Creator and creation.

(6) The double lunar rainbow, a miracle of loveliness, heralds the coming of Him whose foot may well stand on "the keystone of that arc." The face at first is averted and the speaker pleads for pardon if he has done wrong to any lowly friends of Christ in his strong desire that he be right worthily worshiped. Pardon is granted, the Face is revealed, and the vesture glorious sweeps him on in his vision or dream to Rome.

(7) The baldachin, or canopy over the high altar at St. Peter's, is supported by magnificent twisted brazen columns ninety-five feet high, and it weighs about ninety-three tons. The "miraculous Dome of God," designed by Michael Angelo, is one hundred and ninety-five and one half feet in diameter, and its height, from the pavement to the base of the lantern, is four hundred and five feet. The church itself is six hundred and thirteen feet long and four hundred and fifty feet across the transepts.

(8) The speaker at first is disposed to stay outside through his disgust at Rome's errors, but getting a fuller light from the skirt of the garment which he still holds, though its wearer has gone in, he concludes that he, too, may enter where Love, "the all-sufficient," had won so many victories in the past and received so many consecrations, its votaries offering up their dearest in an asceticism which is sincere, even if mistaken.

(9) Terpander was the true founder of Greek classical music, also of lyric poetry; a Lesbian poet and musician, the first who regularly set poetry to music. The principal scene of his labors was Sparta, where he

flourished between 672 and 648 B. C. He carried off the prize four times in succession at the Pythian games in Delphi.

(10) Just as one sculptor may devote himself exclusively to making a gigantic head, giving it his entire time and means, while another is similarly absorbed in "trunk and legs," and only when all efforts are combined can "the whole figure" be revealed, so it is with men in their imperfect grasping after God. Some make love everything and intellect nothing; others do the opposite. The speaker sympathizes with each in turn and condemns neither, but "applauds the great heart of the artist," who occasionally follows the strong promptings which he finds within to do something great, even if unsymmetrical and incomplete.

(11) This rationalistic German professor at the University of Göttingen—a place which has produced many eminent biblical critics, Neander and Ewald among others—is drawn to the life. He shows that Christ "was and was not, both together," was not quite what his followers thought, but was to be revered just about as much on other grounds. The speaker in the next section exhibits the inconsistencies of this view, showing, as has been often done, that the middle ground is not tenable; Christ either was God or not a good man.

(12) Aleph, or A in Hebrew, means an ox, and its form was suggested by an ox's head and horns; so Gimel, the Hebrew G, means camel, and resembles a part of that animal.

(13) The distinction of Christ is not so much that he reveals new truth as that he empowers us, in a way that no mere man could, to do what we know; this is "the real God-function," showing him to be God.

(14) Anapæsts are metrical feet consisting of three syllables, two short and one long; trimeter is a division of verse consisting of three measures of two feet each; levigable means "that may be powdered;" meticulous, "over-cautious;" Iketides, "The Suppliants," or play of Æschylus, called maimed because only a portion of it is extant.

(15) The speaker is able to find something "Christian" and worthy of sympathy even in this well-nigh bloodless and yet manifestly earnest lecturer whose learning is almost loveless. He has not given wings to his passions, but has given up the world; he does not hate God's word, but has consecrated his learning to its exposition; he is striving after truth and has high claims to respect, as is the case with many to-day.

(16) He had been in danger of falling into a mood characterized by "the lazy glow of benevolence," or rather mere tolerant "indifferentism" and carelessness. He sees now that this is not the true position, that there is but "one best way of worship" which he must find and propagate, or do his utmost thereunto, leaving to God the rest.

Tolerance must be united with earnestness, not with coldness, or it will do harm.

(17) Let the world go ; it is no proper judge, it is not even a sympathizing friend ; the only thing of importance is my personal responsibility for what God has directly revealed to my individual soul.

(18) Breccia, an ornamental stone composed of angular fragments ; often of such colors and texture as to answer as a marble.

(19) The "Bourbon bully" was King Ferdinand of Naples, who despoiled the goods of his unfortunate subjects and tortured their persons according to his own evil pleasure, but was in close alliance with the Pope, Pius IX, who had just then (1849) been enabled by French arms to renew the despotism which the people of Rome had heroically striven to shake off.

(20) There has been much "light speech" in the poem, grotesque rhymes and jolting measures, but the speaker, or author, wishes it understood that the apparent "levity" is only on the surface, and that the teachings of the poem are to be taken in deepest religious seriousness. Those teachings are certainly most weighty and profitable, and we may well, on having read it, "conclude with the doxology."

#### EASTER-DAY.\*

##### I.

- How very hard it is to be  
 (1) A Christian ! Hard for you and me,  
 —Not the mere task of making real  
 That duty up to its ideal,  
 Effecting thus, complete and whole,  
 A purpose of the human soul—  
 For that is always hard to do ;  
 But hard, I mean, for me and you  
 To realize it, more or less,  
 With even the moderate success

\* Professor W. J. Dawson has called this poem "the best illustration of the working of Browning's genius in the realm of religious truth." It probably indicates more fully, we may say, the poet's own spiritual convictions than *Christmas-Eve*. In more explicit terms than any other of his poems it conveys the extremely important truth that unless the beauty of nature is a mere foretaste of something durable, and even eternal, it is not a source of peace, but of perpetual pain ; that unless Art can promise itself an endless vista beyond anything that it accomplishes in this world Art gnaws forever at the soul which it possesses. "Human love is an unutterable anguish without the eternal horizons of divine love on which to gaze."

*Easter-Day* is thoroughly serious, and even continuously solemn, in

Which commonly repays our strife  
 To carry out the aims of life.  
 "This aim is greater," you will say,  
 "And so more arduous every way."  
 —But the importance of their fruits  
 Still proves to man, in all pursuits,  
 Proportional encouragement.  
 "Then, what if it be God's intent  
 That labor to this one result  
 Should seem unduly difficult?"  
 Ah, that's a question in the dark—  
 And the sole thing that I remark  
 Upon the difficulty, this:  
 We do not see it where it is,  
 At the beginning of the race:  
 As we proceed, it shifts its place,  
 And where we looked for crowns to fall,  
 We find the tug's to come,—that's all.

## II.

At first you say, "The whole, or chief  
 Of difficulties, is belief.  
 Could I believe once thoroughly,  
 The rest were simple. What? Am I

manner, as befits its subject. It contains no double rhymes, and the lines are of equal length. As a work of art it is of more chastened workmanship than its companion piece, preserving a level of more equable splendor, and it also bears a closer resemblance to the Book of Job, with which the poems have been compared. Taken together they are very nearly equal in length to Job. In both Job and *Easter-Day* doubts abound and the pathway is clouded; but the Hebrew is overwhelmed with evil, and his despondency is natural, while the Christian has none but self-made troubles to disturb his judgment. "In both cases the man has exhausted his intellect in trying, and failing, to choose between God and Baal, and in both the Almighty shows in words of magnificent eloquence the futility of man's power to judge without faith, to enjoy without love. Only in Browning's poem the Christ is love as well as power; in Job God is a being to be feared and worshiped only."

The chief teaching of the poem is that our greatest punishment would be the gratification of our lowest aims. Earth can only serve earth's temporary ends of discipline and development. To transfer it to the future state, or make it eternal, would only result in dreary disappointment and deficiency. "The best of mind on earth is God's part, and in no wise to be considered as inherent in the mind of man. Losing God, he loses his inspirations, and bereft of them in the world he had chosen mind would not avail to light the cloud he had entered." The main points of instruction will be more fully touched upon in the notes that follow.

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

An idiot, do you think,—a beast?  
 Prove to me, only that the least  
 Command of God is God's indeed,  
 And what injunction shall I need  
 To pay obedience? Death so nigh,  
 When time must end, eternity  
 Begin,—and cannot I compute,  
 Weigh loss and gain together, suit  
 My actions to the balance drawn,  
 And give my body to be sawn  
 Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied  
 To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,  
 Like any martyr of the list?  
 How gladly!—if I make acquist,  
 Through the brief minute's fierce annoy,  
 Of God's eternity of joy."

## III.

—And certainly you name the point  
 Whereon all turns: for could you joint  
 This flexible finite life once tight  
 Into the fixed and infinite,  
 You, safe inside, would spurn what's out,  
 With carelessness enough, no doubt—  
 Would spurn mere life: but when time brings  
 To their next stage your reasonings,  
 Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink  
 Nor see the path so well, I think.

## IV.

You say, "Faith may be, one agrees,  
 A touchstone to God's purposes,  
 Even as ourselves conceive of them.  
 Could he acquit us or condemn  
 For holding what no hand can loose,  
 Rejecting when we can't but choose?  
 As well award the victor's wreath  
 To whosoever should take breath  
 Duly each minute while he lived—  
 Grant heaven, because a man contrived  
 To see its sunlight every day  
 He walked forth on the public way.  
 You must mix some uncertainty  
 With faith, if you would have faith be.  
 Why, what but faith, do we abhor  
 And idolize each other for—  
 Faith in our evil or our good,  
 Which is or is not understood  
 Aright by those we love or those  
 We hate, thence called our friends or foes?  
 Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,  
 When, turning from the ugly face,

I found belief in it too hard;  
 And she and I have our reward.  
 —Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us  
 Weak beings, to go using thus  
 A touchstone for our little ends,  
 Trying with faith the foes and friends ;  
 —But God, bethink you ! I would fain  
 Conceive of the Creator's reign  
 As based upon exacter laws  
 Than creatures build by with applause.  
 In all God's acts—(as Plato cries  
 He doth)—he should geometrize.  
 (2) Whence, I desiderate<sup>#</sup> . . .

## V.

I see !  
 You would grow as a natural tree,  
 Stand as a rock, soar up like fire.  
 The world's so perfect and entire,  
 Quite above faith, so right and fit !  
 Go there, walk up and down in it !  
 No. The creation travails, groans—  
 Contrive your music from its moans,  
 Without or let or hindrance, friend !  
 That's an old story, and its end  
 As old—you come back (be sincere)  
 With every question you put here  
 (Here where there once was, and is still,  
 We think, a living oracle,  
 Whose answers you stand carping at)  
 This time flung back unanswered flat,—  
 Beside, perhaps, as many more  
 As those that drove you out before,  
 Now added, where was little need.  
 Questions impossible, indeed,  
 To us who sat still, all and each  
 Persuaded that our earth had speech,  
 Of God's, writ down, no matter if  
 In cursive type or hieroglyph,—  
 Which one fact freed us from the yoke  
 Of guessing why He never spoke.  
 You come back in no better plight  
 (3) Than when you left us,—am I right ?

## VI.

So, the old process, I conclude,  
 Goes on, the reasoning's pursued  
 Further. You own, "Tis well averred,  
 A scientific faith's absurd,  
 —Frustrates the very end 'twas meant  
 To serve. So, I would rest content  
 With a mere probability,  
 But, probable; the chance must lie

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,  
 So long as there be just enough  
 To pin my faith to, though it hap  
 Only at points : from gap to gap  
 One hangs up a huge curtain so,  
 Grandly, nor seeks to have it go  
 Foldless and flat along the wall.  
 What care I if some interval  
 Of life less plainly may depend  
 On God? I'd hang there to the end ;  
 And thus I should not find it hard  
 (4) To be a Christian and debarred  
 From trailing on the earth, till furled  
 Away by death.—Renounce the world !  
 Were that a mighty hardship ? Plan  
 A pleasant life, and straight some man  
 Beside you, with, if he thought fit,  
 Abundant means to compass it,  
 Shall turn deliberate aside  
 To try and live as, if you tried  
 You clearly might, yet most despise.  
 One friend of mine wears out his eyes,  
 Slighting the stupid joys of sense,  
 In patient hope that, ten years hence,  
 'Somewhat completer,' he may say,  
 'My list of *coleoptera!*'  
 While just the other who most laughs  
 At him, above all epitaphs  
 Aspires to have his tomb describe  
 Himself as sole among the tribe  
 Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed  
 A Grignon with the Regent's crest.  
 So that, subduing, as you want,  
 Whatever stands predominant  
 Among my earthly appetites  
 For tastes and smells and sounds and sights,  
 I shall be doing that alone,  
 To gain a palm-branch and a throne,  
 Which fifty people undertake  
 To do, and gladly, for the sake  
 Of giving a Semitic guess,  
 Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

## VII.

Good: and the next thing is,—look round  
 For evidence enough ! 'Tis found,  
 No doubt: as is your sort of mind,  
 So is your sort of search: you'll find  
 What you desire, and that's to be  
 A Christian. What says history?  
 How comforting a point it were  
 To find some mummy-scrap declare

- There lived a Moses ! Better still,  
 Prove Jonah's whale translatable  
 Into some quicksand of the seas,  
 Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,  
 That faith might flap her wings and crow  
 From such an eminence ! Or, no—  
 The human heart's best; you prefer  
 Making that prove the minister  
 To truth; you probe its wants and needs,  
 And hopes and fears, then try what creeds  
 Meet these most aptly,—resolute  
 That faith plucks such substantial fruit  
 Wherever these two correspond,  
 She little needs to look beyond  
 (5) And puzzle out who Orpheus was,  
 Or Dionysius Zagrias.  
 You'll find sufficient, as I say,  
 To satisfy you either way;  
 You wanted to believe ; your pains  
 Are crowned—you do : and what remains?  
 "Renounce the world!"—Ah, were it done  
 By merely cutting one by one  
 Your limbs off, with your wise head last,  
 How easy were it!—how soon past,  
 If once in the believing mood!  
 "Such is man's usual gratitude,  
 Such thanks to God do we return,  
 For not exacting that we spurn  
 A single gift of life, forego  
 One real gain,—only taste them so  
 With gravity and temperance,  
 That those mild virtues may enhance  
 Such pleasures, rather than abstract—  
 Last spice of which, will be the fact  
 Of love discerned in every gift ;  
 While, when the scene of life shall shift,  
 And the gay heart be taught to ache,  
 As sorrows and privations take  
 The place of joy,—the thing that seems  
 Mere misery, under human schemes,  
 Becomes, regarded by the light  
 Of love, as very near or quite  
 As good a gift as joy before.  
 So plain is it that, all the more  
 A dispensation's merciful,  
 More pettishly we try and cull  
 Briers, thistles, from our private plot,  
 To mar God's ground where thorns are not!"

## VIII.

Do you say this, or I ?—O, you !  
 Then, what, my friend ?—(thus I pursue

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Our parley)—you indeed opine  
 That the Eternal and Divine  
 Did, eighteen centuries ago,  
 In very truth . . . Enough ! you know  
 The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,  
 That Life, that Death ! And all, the earth  
 Shuddered at,—all, the heavens grew black  
 Rather than see ; all, nature's rack  
 And thro' at dissolution's brink  
 Attested,—all took place, you think,  
 Only to give our joys a zest,  
 And prove our sorrows for the best ?  
 We differ, then ! Were I, still pale  
 And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,  
 Waiting to hear God's voice declare  
 What horror followed for my share,  
 As implicated in the deed,  
 Apart from other sins,—concede  
 That if He blacked out in a blot  
 My brief life's pleasantness, 'twere not  
 So very disproportionate !  
 Or there might be another fate—  
 I certainly could understand  
 (If fancies were the thing in hand)  
 How God might save, at that day's price,  
 The impure in their impurities,  
 Give license formal and complete  
 To choose the fair and pick the sweet.  
 But there be certain words, broad, plain,  
 Uttered again and yet again,  
 Hard to mistake or overgloss—  
 Announcing this world's gain for loss,  
 And bidding us reject the same :  
 The whole world lieth (they proclaim)  
 In wickedness,—come out of it !  
 Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,  
 But I who thrill through every nerve  
 At thought of what deaf ears deserve—  
 How do you counsel in the case ?

## IX.

“ I'd take, by all means, in your place,  
 The safe side, since it so appears :  
 Deny myself, a few brief years,  
 The natural pleasure, leave the fruit  
 Or cut the plant up by the root.  
 Remember what a martyr said  
 On the rude tablet overhead !  
 ‘ I was born sickly, poor and mean,  
 A slave : no misery could screen  
 The holders of the pearl of price  
 From Cæsar's envy ; therefore twice

I fought with beasts, and three times saw  
 My children suffer by his law ;  
 At last my own release was earned :  
 I was some time in being burned,  
 But at the close a Hand came through  
 The fire above my head, and drew  
 My soul to Christ, whom now I see.  
 Sergius, a brother, writes for me  
 This testimony on the wall—  
 For me, I have forgot it all.  
 You say right ; this were not so hard !  
 And since one nowise is debarred  
 From this, why not escape some sins  
 By such a method ? ”

## X.

Then begins

- To the old point revulsion new—  
 (For 'tis just this I bring you to)—  
 If after all we should mistake,  
 And so renounce life for the sake  
 Of death and nothing else ? You hear  
 Each friend we jeered at, send the jeer  
 Back to ourselves with good effect—  
 “ There were my beetles to collect !  
 My box—a trifle, I confess,  
 But here I hold it, ne'ertheless ! ”  
 Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart  
 And answer) we, the better part  
 (6) Have chosen, though 'twere only hope,—  
 Nor envy moles like you that grope  
 Amid your veritable muck,  
 More than the grasshoppers would truck,  
 For yours, their passionate life away,  
 That spends itself in leaps all day  
 To reach the sun, you want the eyes  
 To see, as they the wings to rise  
 And match the noble hearts of them !  
 Thus the contemner we contemn,—  
 And, when doubt strikes us, thus we ward  
 Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,  
 —Not struck enough to overturn  
 Our faith, but shake it—make us learn  
 What I began with, and, I wis,  
 End, having proved,—how hard it is  
 To be a Christian !

## XI.

“ Proved, or not,  
 Howe'er you wis, small thanks, I wot,  
 You get of mine, for taking pains  
 To make it hard to me. Who gains

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

By that, I wonder? Here I live  
 In trusting ease; and here you drive  
 At causing me to lose what most  
 Yourself would mourn for had you lost!"

## XII.

But, do you see, my friend, that thus  
 You leave Saint Paul for Aeschylus?  
 (7) —Who made his Titan's arch-device  
 The giving men *blind hopes* to spice  
 The meal of life with, else devoured  
 In bitter haste, while lo, death loured  
 Before them at the platter's edge!  
 If faith should be, as I allege,  
 Quite other than a condiment  
 To heighten flavors with, or meant  
 (Like that brave curry of his Grace)  
 To take at need the victuals' place?  
 If, having dined, you would digest  
 Besides, and turning to your rest  
 Should find instead . . .

## XIII.

Now, you shall see  
 And judge if a mere poppery  
 Pricks on my speaking! I resolve  
 To utter—yes, it shall devolve  
 On you to hear as solemn, strange  
 And dread a thing as in the range  
 Of facts,—or fancies, if God will—  
 E'er happened to our kind! I still  
 Stand in the cloud and, while it wraps  
 My face, ought not to speak perhaps;  
 Seeing that if I carry through  
 My purpose, if my words in you  
 Find a live actual listener,  
 My story, reason must aver  
 False after all—the happy chance!  
 While, if each human countenance  
 I meet in London day by day,  
 Be what I fear,—my warnings fray  
 No one, and no one they convert,  
 And no one helps me to assert  
 How hard it is to really be  
 A Christian, and in vacancy  
 I pour this story!

## XIV.

I commence  
 By trying to inform you, whence  
 It comes that every Easter-night  
 As now, I sit up, watch, till light,

Upon those chimney-stacks and roofs,  
 Give, through my window-pane, gray proofs  
 That Easter-Day is breaking slow.  
 On such a night, three years ago,  
 It chanced that I had cause to cross  
 The common, where the chapel was,  
 Our friend spoke of, the other day—  
 You've not forgotten, I dare say.

I fell to musing of the time  
 So close, the blessed matin-prime  
 All hearts leap up at, in some guise—  
 One could not well do otherwise.  
 Insensibly my thoughts were bent  
 Toward the main point ; I overwent  
 Much the same ground of reasoning  
 As you and I just now. One thing  
 Remained, however—one that tasked  
 My soul to answer ; and I asked,  
 Fairly and frankly, what might be  
 That History, that Faith, to me  
 —Me there—not me in some domain  
 Built up and peopled by my brain,  
 Weighing its merits as one weighs  
 Mere theories for blame or praise,

- (8) —The kingcraft of the Lucumons,  
 Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—  
 But my faith there, or none at all.  
 " How were my case, now, did I fall  
 Dead here, this minute—should I lie  
 Faithful or faithless ? " Note that I  
 Inclined thus ever !—little prone  
 For instance, when I lay alone  
 In childhood, to go calm to sleep  
 And leave a closet where might keep  
 His watch perdus some murderer  
 Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,  
 As good authentic legends tell :  
 " He might : but how improbable !  
 How little likely to deserve  
 The pains and trial to the nerve  
 Of thrusting head into the dark !"—  
 Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark  
 Beside, that, should the dreadful scout  
 Really lie hid there, and leap out  
 At first turn of the rusty key,  
 Mine were small gain that she could see,  
 Killed not in bed but on the floor,  
 And losing one night's sleep the more.  
 I tell you, I would always burst  
 The door ope, know my fate at first.  
 This time, indeed, the closet penned  
 No such assassin : but a friend  
 Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

For counsel, Common Sense, to wit,  
 Who said a good deal that might pass,—  
 Heartening, impartial too, it was,  
 Judge else: "For, soberly now,—who  
 Should be a Christian if not you?"  
 (Hear how he smoothed me down.) "One takes  
 A whole life, sees what course it makes  
 Mainly, and not by fits and starts—  
 In spite of stoppage which imparts  
 Fresh value to the general speed.  
 A life, with none, would fly indeed :  
 Your progressing is slower—right!  
 We deal with progress and not flight.  
 Though baffling senses passionate,  
 Fancies as restless,—with a freight  
 Of knowledge cumbersome enough  
 To sink your ship when waves grow rough,  
 Though meant for ballast in the hold,—  
 I find, 'mid dangers manifold,  
 The good bark answers to the helm  
 Where faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm  
 Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,  
 Whose hard head could not, if it tried,  
 Conceive a doubt; nor understand  
 How senses hornier than his hand  
 Should 'tice the Christian off his guard.  
 More happy! But shall we award  
 Less honor to the hull which, dogged  
 By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,  
 Masts by the board, her bulwarks gone  
 And stanchions going, yet bears on,—  
 Than to mere lifeboats, built to save,  
 And triumph o'er the breaking wave?  
 Make perfect your good ship as these,  
 And what were her performances!"  
 I added—"Would the ship reach home?  
 I wish indeed 'God's kingdom come'—  
 The day when I shall see appear  
 His bidding, as my duty, clear  
 From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,  
 Some future season; Easter may  
 Prove, not impossibly, the time—  
 Yes, that were striking—fates would chime  
 So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring  
 The Judgment!—deeper in the spring  
 Than now, however, when there's snow  
 Capping the hills; for earth must show  
 All signs of meaning to pursue  
 Her tasks as she was wont to do  
 —The skylark, taken by surprise  
 As we ourselves, shall recognize  
 Sudden the end. For suddenly  
 It comes; the dreadfulness must be

- In that ; all warrants the belief—  
 ‘At night it cometh like a thief.’  
 I fancy why the trumpet blows ;  
 —Plainly, to wake one. From repose  
 We shall start up, at last awake  
 From life, that insane dream we take  
 For waking now, because it seems.  
 And as, when now we wake from dreams,  
 We laugh, while we recall them, ‘ Fool,  
 To let the chance slip, linger cool  
 When such adventure offered ! Just  
 A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust  
 Aside, a wicked mage to stab—  
 (9) And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab !’  
 So shall we marvel why we grudged  
 Our labor here, and idly judged  
 Of heaven, we might have gained, but lose !  
 Lose ? Talk of loss, and I refuse  
 To plead at all ! You speak no worse  
 Nor better than my ancient nurse  
 When she would tell me in my youth  
 I well deserved that shapes uncouth  
 Frighted and teased me in my sleep :  
 Why could I not in memory keep  
 Her precept for the evil’s cure ?  
 ‘Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure  
 You’ll wake forthwith ! ’ ”

## XV.

And as I said  
 This nonsense, throwing back my head  
 With light complacent laugh, I found  
 Suddenly all the midnight round  
 One fire. The dome of heaven had stood  
 As made up of a multitude  
 Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack  
 Of ripples infinite and black,  
 From sky to sky. Sudden there went,  
 Like horror and astonishment,  
 A fierce vindictive scribble of red  
 Quick flame across, as if one said  
 (The angry scribe of Judgment). “ There—  
 Burn it ! ” And straight I was aware  
 That the whole ribwork round, minute  
 Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,  
 Was tinted, each with its own spot  
 Of burning at the core, till clot  
 Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire  
 Over all heaven, which ‘gan suspire  
 As fanned to measure equable.—  
 Just so great conflagrations kill  
 Night overhead, and rise and sink,  
 Reflected. Now the fire would shrink

And wither off the blasted face  
 Of heaven, and I distinct might trace  
 The sharp black ridgy outlines left  
 Unburned like network—then, each cleft  
 The fire had been sucked back into,  
 Regorged, and out it surging flew  
 Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,  
 Till, tolerating to be tamed  
 No longer, certain rays world-wide  
 Shot downwardly. On every side  
 Caught past escape, the earth was lit ;  
 As if a dragon's nostril split  
 And all his famished ire o'erflowed ;  
 Then, as he winced at his lord's goad,  
 Back he inhaled : whereat I found  
 The clouds into vast pillars bound,  
 Based on the corners of the earth,  
 Propping the skies at top : a dearth  
 Of fire i' the violet intervals,  
 Leaving exposed the utmost walls  
 Of time, about to tumble in  
 And end the world.

## xvi.

I felt begin  
 The Judgment-Day : to retrocede  
 Was too late now. "In very deed,"  
 (I uttered to myself) "that Day!"  
 The intuition burned away  
 All darkness from my spirit too :  
 There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,  
 Choosing the world. The choice was made ;  
 And naked and disguiseless stayed,  
 And unevadable, the fact.  
 My brain held all the same compact  
 Its senses, nor my heart declined  
 Its office ; rather, both combined  
 To help me in this juncture. I  
 Lost not a second,—agony  
 Gave boldness : since my life had end  
 And my choice with it—best defend,  
 Applaud both! I resolved to say,  
 "So was I framed by thee, such way  
 I put to use thy senses here !  
 It was so beautiful, so near,  
 Thy world,—what could I then but choose  
 My part there ? Nor did I refuse  
 To look above the transient boon  
 Of time ; but it was hard so soon  
 As in a short life, to give up  
 Such beauty : I could put the cup,  
 Undrained of half its fulness, by ;  
 But, to renounce it utterly,

—That was too hard ! Nor did the cry  
 Which bade renounce it, touch my brain  
 Authentically deep and plain  
 Enough to make my lips let go.  
 But thou, who knowest all, dost know  
 Whether I was not, life's brief while,  
 Endeavoring to reconcile  
 Those lips (too tardily, alas !)  
 To letting the dear remnant pass,  
 One day,—some drops of earthly good  
 Untasted ! Is it for this mood,  
 That thou, whose earth delights so well,  
 Hast made its complement a hell ? ”

## XVII.

A final belch of fire like blood,  
 Overbroke all heaven in one flood  
 Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky  
 Fire, and both, one brief ecstasy,  
 Then ashes. But I heard no noise  
 (Whatever was) because a voice  
 Beside me spoke thus, “ Life is done,  
 Time ends, Eternity's begun,  
 And thou art judged forevermore.”

## XVIII.

I looked up ; all seemed as before ;  
 Of that cloud-Tophet overhead  
 No trace was left : I saw instead  
 The common round me, and the sky  
 Above, stretched drear and emptily  
 Of life. ’Twas the last watch of night,  
 Except what brings the morning quite ;  
 When the armed angel, conscience-clear,  
 His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear  
 And gazes on the earth he guards,  
 Safe one night more through all its wards,  
 Till God relieve him at his post.  
 “ A dream—a waking dream at most ! ”  
 (I spoke out quick, that I might shake  
 The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)  
 “ The world gone, yet the world is here ?  
 Are not all things as they appear ?  
 Is Judgment past for me alone ?  
 —And where had place the great white throne ?  
 The rising of the quick and dead ?  
 Where stood they, small and great ? Who read  
 The sentence from the opened book ? ”  
 So, by degrees, the blood forsook  
 My heart, and let it beat afresh ;  
 I knew I should break through the mesh  
 Of horror, and breathe presently :  
 When, lo, again, the voice by me !

## XIX.

I saw . . . O brother, 'mid far sands  
 The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,  
 Bright-white beneath, as heaven, bright-blue,  
 Leans o'er it, while the years pursue  
 Their course, unable to abate  
 Its paradisal laugh at fate!  
 One morn,—the Arab staggers blind  
 O'er a new tract of death, calcined  
 To ashes, silence, nothingness,—  
 And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess  
 Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies  
 And prostrate earth, he should surprise  
 The imaged vapor, head to foot,  
 Surveying, motionless and mute,  
 Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt  
 It vanish up again?—So hapt  
 My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke  
 Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—  
 I saw him. One magnific pall  
 Mantled in massive fold and fall  
 His head, and coiled in snaky swathes  
 About his feet: night's black, that bathes  
 All else, broke, grizzled with despair,  
 Against the soul of blackness there.  
 A gesture told the mood within—  
 That wrapped right hand which based the chin,  
 That intense meditation fixed  
 On his procedure,—pity mixed  
 With the fulfillment of decree.  
 Motionless, thus, he spoke to me,  
 Who fell before his feet, a mass,  
 No man now.

## XX.

"All is come to pass.  
 Such shows are over for each soul  
 They had respect to. In the roll  
 Of Judgment which convinced mankind  
 Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,  
 Terror must burn the truth into:  
 Their fate for them!—thou hadst to do  
 With absolute omnipotence,  
 Able its judgments to dispense  
 To the whole race, as every one  
 Were its sole object. Judgment done,  
 God is, thou art,—the rest is hurled  
 To nothingness for thee. This world,  
 This finite life, thou hast preferred,  
 In disbelief of God's plain word,  
 To heaven and to infinity.  
 Here the probation was for thee,  
 To show thy soul the earthly mixed

With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.  
 The earthly joys lay palpable,—  
 A taint, in each, distinct as well ;  
 The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,  
 Above them, but as truly were  
 Taintless, so, in their nature, best.  
 Thy choice was earth : thou didst attest  
 'Twas fitter spirit should subserve  
 The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve  
 Beneath the spirit's play. Advance  
 No claim to their inheritance  
 Who chose the spirit's fugitive  
 Brief gleams, and yearned, ' This were to live  
 Indeed, if rays, completely pure  
 From flesh that dulls them, could endure,—  
 Not shoot in meteor-light athwart  
 Our earth, to show how cold and swart  
 It lies beneath their fire, but stand  
 As stars do, destined to expand,  
 Prove veritable worlds, our home !'  
 Thou saidst,—' Let spirit star the dome  
 Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,  
 No nook of earth,—I shall not seek  
 Its service further !' Thou art shut  
 Out of the heaven of spirit ; glut  
 Thy sense upon the world : 'tis thine  
 Forever—take it ! "

## XXI.

" How ? Is mine,  
 The world ? " (I cried, while my soul broke  
 Out in a transport.) " Hast thou spoke  
 Plainly in that ? Earth's exquisite  
 Treasures of wonder and delight  
 For me ? "

## XXII.

The austere voice returned,—  
 " So soon made happy ? Hadst thou learned  
 What God accounteth happiness,  
 Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess  
 What hell may be his punishment  
 For those who doubt if God invent  
 Better than they. Let such men rest  
 Content with what they judged the best.  
 Let the unjust usurp at will :  
 The filthy shall be filthy still :  
 Miser, there waits the gold for thee !  
 Hater, indulge thine enmity !  
 And thou, whose heaven self-ordained  
 Was, to enjoy earth unrestrained,  
 Do it ! Take all the ancient show !  
 The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,

And men apparently pursue  
 Their works, as they were wont to do,  
 While living in probation yet.  
 I promise not thou shalt forget  
 The past, now gone to its account ;  
 But leave thee with the old amount  
 Of faculties, nor less nor more,  
 Unvisited, as heretofore,  
 By God's free spirit, that makes an end.  
 So, once more, take thy world ! Expend  
 Eternity upon its shows  
 Flung thee as freely as one rose  
 Out of a summer's opulence,  
 Over the Eden-barrier whence  
 Thou art excluded. Knock in vain ! ”

## XXIII.

I sat up. All was still again.  
 I breathed free : to my heart, back fled  
 The warmth. “ But, all the world ! ”—I said.  
 I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,  
 And recollect ed I might learn  
 From books, how many myriad sorts  
 Of fern exist, to trust reports,  
 Each as distinct and beautiful  
 As this, the very first I cull.  
 Think, from the first leaf to the last !  
 Conceive, then, earth's resources ! Vast  
 Exhaustless beauty, endless change  
 Of wonder ! And this foot shall range  
 Alps, Andes,—and this eye devour  
 The bee-bird and the aloe-flower ?

## XXIV.

Then the voice : “ Welcome so to rate  
 The arras-folds that variegate  
 The earth, God's antechamber, well !  
 The wise, who waited there, could tell  
 By these, what royalties in store  
 Lay one step past the entrance-door.  
 For whom, was reckoned, not too much,  
 This life's munificence ? For such  
 As thou,—a race, whereof scarce one  
 Was able, in a million,  
 To feel that any marvel lay  
 In objects round his feet all day ;  
 Scarce one, in many millions more,  
 Willing, if able, to explore  
 The secrete r, minuter charm !  
 —Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm  
 Of power to cope with God's intent,—  
 Or scared if the south firmament

With north-fire did its wings refledge !  
 All partial beauty was a pledge  
 Of beauty in its plenitude :  
 But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,  
 Retain it ! plenitude be theirs  
 Who looked above ! ”

## XXV.

Though sharp despairs  
 Shot through me, I held up, bore on.  
 “ What matter though my trust were gone  
 From natural things ? Henceforth my part  
 Be less with nature than with art !  
 For art supplants, gives mainly worth  
 To nature ; 'tis man stamps the earth—  
 And I will seek his impress, seek  
 The statuary of the Greek,  
 Italy's painting—there my choice  
 Shall fix ! ”

## XXVI.

“ Obtain it ! ” said the voice,  
 “ The one form with its single act,  
 Which sculptors labored to abstract,  
 The one face, painters tried to draw,  
 With its one look, from throngs they saw.  
 And that perfection in their soul,  
 These only hinted at ? The whole,  
 They were but parts of ? What each laid  
 His claim to glory on ?—afraid  
 His fellow-men should give him rank  
 By mere tentatives which he shrank  
 Smitten at heart from, all the more,  
 That gazers pressed in to adore !  
 ‘ Shall I be judged by only these ? ’  
 If such his soul's capacities,  
 Even while he trod the earth,—think, now,  
 What pomp in Buonarroti's brow,  
 With its new palace-brain where dwells  
 Superb the soul, un vexed by cells  
 That crumbled with the transient clay !  
 What visions will his right hand's sway  
 Still turn to forms, as still they burst  
 Upon him ? How will he quench thirst,  
 Titanically infantine,  
 Laid at the breast of the Divine ?  
 Does it confound thee,—this first page  
 Emblazoning man's heritage ?—  
 Can this alone absorb thy sight,  
 As pages were not infinite,—  
 Like the omnipotence which tasks  
 Itself to furnish all that asks  
 The soul it means to satiate ?

What was the world, the starry state  
 Of the broad skies,—what, all displays  
 Of power and beauty intermixed,  
 Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—  
 What else than needful furniture  
 For life's first stage? God's work, be sure,  
 No more spreads wasted, than falls scant!  
 He filled, did not exceed, man's want  
 Of beauty in this life. But through  
 Life pierce,—and what has earth to do,  
 Its utmost beauty's appanage,  
 With the requirement of next stage?  
 Did God pronounce earth 'very good'?  
 Needs must it be, while understood  
 For man's preparatory state;  
 Naught here to heighten nor abate;  
 Transfer the same completeness here,  
 To serve a new state's use,—and drear  
 Deficiency gapes every side!  
 The good, tried once, were bad, retried.  
 See the enwrapping rocky niche,  
 Sufficient for the sleep in which  
 The lizard breathes for ages safe:  
 Split the mould—and as light would chafe  
 The creature's new world-widened sense,  
 Dazzled to death at evidence  
 Of all the sounds and sights that broke  
 InnumEROus at the chisel's stroke,—  
 So, in God's eye, the earth's first stuff  
 Was, neither more nor less, enough  
 To house man's soul, man's need fulfil.  
 Man reckoned it immeasurable?  
 So thinks the lizard of his vault!  
 Could God be taken in default,  
 Short of contrivances, by you,—  
 Or reached, ere ready to pursue  
 His progress through eternity?  
 That chambered rock, the lizard's world,  
 Your easy mallet's blow has hurled  
 To nothingness forever; so,  
 Has God abolished at a blow  
 This world, wherein his saints were pent,—  
 Who, though found grateful and content,  
 With the provision there, as thou,  
 Yet knew he would not disallow  
 Their spirit's hunger, felt as well,—  
 Unsated,—not unsatiable,  
 As paradise gives proof. Deride  
 Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside!"

## XXVII.

I cried in anguish: "Mind, the mind,  
 So miserably cast behind,

To gain what had been wisely lost !  
 O, let me strive to make the most  
 Of the poor stinted soul, I nipped  
 Of budding wings, else now equipped  
 For voyage from summer isle to isle !  
 And though she needs must reconcile  
 Ambition to the life on ground,  
 Still, I can profit by late found  
 But precious knowledge. Mind is best—  
 I will seize mind, forego the rest,  
 And try how far my tethered strength  
 May crawl in this poor breadth and length.  
 Let me, since I can fly no more,  
 At least spin dervish-like about  
 (Till giddy rapture almost doubt  
 I fly) through circling sciences,  
 Philosophies and histories !  
 Should the whirl slacken there, then verse,  
 Fining to music, shall asperse  
 Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain  
 Intoxicate, half-break my chain !  
 Not joyless, though more favored feet  
 Stand calm, where I want wings to beat  
 The floor. At least earth's bond is broke !"

## XXVIII.

Then (sickening even while I spoke) :  
 "Let me alone ! No answer, pray,  
 To this ! I know what thou wilt say !  
 All still is earth's,—to know, as much  
 As feel its truths, which if we touch  
 With sense, or apprehend in soul,  
 What matter ? I have reached the goal—  
 'Whereto does knowledge serve ?' will burn  
 My eyes, too sure, at every turn !  
 I cannot look back now, nor stake  
 Bliss on the race, for running's sake.  
 The goal's a ruin like the rest !"  
 "And so much worse thy latter quest,"—  
 (Added the voice,) "that even on earth—  
 Whenever, in man's soul, had birth  
 Those intuitions, grasps of guess,  
 Which pull the more into the less,  
 Making the finite comprehend  
 Infinity,—the bard would spend  
 Such praise alone, upon his craft,  
 As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,  
 Goes to the craftsman who arranged  
 The seven strings, changed them and recharged—  
 Knowing it was the South that harped.  
 He felt his song, in singing, warped ;  
 Distinguished his and God's part : whence  
 A world of spirit as of sense

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

Was plain to him, yet not too plain,  
 Which he could traverse, not remain  
 A guest in :—else were permanent  
 Heaven on the earth its gleams were meant  
 To sting with hunger for full light,—  
 Made visible in verse, despite  
 The veiling weakness,—truth by means  
 Of fable, showing while it screens,—  
 Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,  
 Was ever fable on outside.  
 Such gleams made bright the earth an age ;  
 Now the whole sun's his heritage !  
 Take up thy world, it is allowed,  
 Thou who hast entered in the cloud !”

## XXIX.

Then I—“Behold, my spirit bleeds,  
 Catches no more at broken reeds,—  
 But lilies flower those reeds above :  
 I let the world go, and take love !  
 Love survives in me, albeit those  
 I love be henceforth masks and shows,  
 Not living men and women : still  
 I mind how love repaired all ill,  
 Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends  
 With parents, brothers, children, friends !  
 Some semblance of a woman yet  
 With eyes to help me to forget,  
 Shall look on me ; and I will match  
 Departed love with love, attach  
 Old memories to new dreams, nor scorn  
 The poorest of the grains of corn  
 I save from shipwreck on this isle,  
 Trusting its barrenness may smile  
 With happy foodful green one day,  
 More precious for the pains. I pray,—  
 Leave to love, only !”

## XXX.

At the word,  
 The form, I looked to have been stirred  
 With pity and approval, rose  
 O'er me, as when the headsman throws  
 Axe over shoulder to make end—  
 I fell prone, letting him expend  
 His wrath, while thus the inflicting voice  
 Smote me. “Is this thy final choice ?  
 Love is the best? 'Tis somewhat late!  
 And all thou dost enumerate  
 Of power and beauty in the world,  
 The mightiness of love was curled  
 Inextricably round about.  
 Love lay within it and without,

To clasp thee,—but in vain ! Thy soul  
 Still shrunk from him who made the whole,  
 Still set deliberate aside  
 His love !—Now take love ! Well betide  
 Thy tardy conscience ! Haste to take  
 The show of love for the name's sake,  
 Remembering every moment who,  
 Beside creating thee unto  
 These ends, and these for thee, was said  
 To undergo death in thy stead  
 In flesh like thine : so ran the tale.  
 What doubt in thee could countervail  
 Belief in it ? Upon the ground  
 'That in the story had been found  
 Too much love ! How could God love so ?'  
 He who in all his works below  
 Adapted to the needs of man,  
 Made love the basis of the plan,—  
 Did love, as was demonstrated :  
 While man, who was so fit instead  
 To hate, as every day gave proof,—  
 Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,  
 Both could and did invent that scheme  
 Of perfect love: 'twould well beseem  
 Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,  
 Not tally with God's usual ways !"

## XXXI.

And I cowered deprecatingly—  
 "Thou Love of God ! Or let me die,  
 Or grant what shall seem heaven almost !  
 Let me not know that all is lost,  
 Though lost it be—leave me not tied  
 To this despair, this corpse-like bride !  
 Let that old life seem mine—no more—  
 With limitation as before,  
 With darkness, hunger, toil, distress :  
 Be all the earth a wilderness !  
 Only let me go on, go on,  
 Still hoping ever and anon  
 To reach one eve the Better Land !"

## XXXII.

Then did the form expand, expand—  
 I knew him through the dread disguise  
 As the whole God within his eyes  
 Embraced me.

(10) XXXIII  
 When I lived again,  
 The day was breaking,—the gray plain

## THE BEST OF BROWNING.

I rose from, silvered thick with dew.  
 Was this a vision? False or true?  
 Since then, three varied years are spent,  
 And commonly my mind is bent  
 To think it was a dream—be sure  
 A mere dream and distemperature—  
 The last day's watching: then the night,—  
 The shock of that strange Northern Light  
 Set my head swimming, bred in me  
 A dream. And so I live, you see,  
 Go through the world, try, prove, reject,  
 Prefer, still struggling to effect  
 My warfare; happy that I can  
 Be crossed and thwarted as a man,  
 Not left in God's contempt apart,  
 With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,  
 Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.  
 Thank God, she still each method tries  
 To catch me, who may yet escape,  
 She knows,—the fiend in angel's shape!  
 Thank God, no paradise stands barred  
 To entry, and I find it hard  
 To be a Christian, as I said!  
 Still every now and then my head  
 Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear  
 Spite of the sunshine, while I fear  
 And think, "How dreadful to be grudged  
 No ease henceforth, as one that's judged,  
 Condemned to earth forever, shut  
 From heaven!"

But Easter-Day breaks! But  
 Christ rises! Mercy every way  
 (ii) Is infinite,—and who can say?

## NOTES.

(1) As will readily be seen, we have here a dialogue between a believer and a skeptic, the portions uttered by the latter being put in quotation marks. It is the former that tells the story, relating through what strange experiences he has come to his present faith. He begins by remarking on the practical difficulties of leading a Christian life, which he seems to think grow greater as one advances. But many would certainly differ with him on this latter point. It is noteworthy that the believer has a tendency toward pessimism, while the skeptic is of a more hopeful turn of mind.

(2) The skeptic declares that no one but a fool would refuse a moment's pain to gain an eternity of bliss—hence the real trouble must be that people do not thoroughly believe in the close jointure of the finite and the infinite life. He admits, however, that it would not do to have things too plain; that mathematical demonstration in divine matters

would remove an important part of probation ; that it is well to have " faith a touchstone " to show what sort of creatures we are, by giving us the chance to exercise a really free moral choice. But still it cannot be that God needs to apply such tests. Therefore he desires some further explanation of the difficulty.

(3) The believer replies that he who carps at the " living oracle " and resorts to guessing, or demands explanations such as " God's speech, writ down," does not vouchsafe, makes no real advance over his brother in understanding the groans of creation, the problems of providence.

(4) The skeptic makes the point that to be a Christian, if the proof of advantage in being so is even merely probable (as it surely should be), ought not to present any great difficulty, for multitudes overcome equal difficulties in following all sorts of whims which we perhaps despise—such as studying beetles, collecting snuffboxes, investigating obscure Semitic roots, or playing chess. *Coleoptera*, a Greek word meaning sheath-winged, is the scientific term for beetles. Grignon was a famous snuffbox maker, whose name was used for the most fashionable article.

(5) Orpheus, a mythical bard, son of Apollo and the muse Calliope, about whom many wonderful stories were told. Dionysus Zagreus (which means " torn to pieces ") was the horned child of Zeus, torn to pieces by the Titans at the command of jealous Hera, and reborn by Semele as the Thracian Bacchus. He was the god of luxuriant fertility, especially as displayed by the vine ; hence, the god of wine.

The man of faith says that since people find whatever they search for there is proof enough to satisfy those who are " in the believing mood." His friend answers that God does not really desire us to renounce the world, and it is only our perverse misapprehension of his dispensation that puts so severe a face on religion.

(6) St. Paul lays very great emphasis on the cheer afforded by the Christian's hope—" the hope of the Gospel," " Christ the hope of glory," " that blessed hope," " hope of eternal life," " full assurance of hope," " saved by hope." The passages are too numerous to quote.

(7) The believer rightly justifies his disturbance of the " trusting ease " of his friend by explaining that the latter's hopes are blind, like those which, according to the poet Æschylus, Prometheus the Titan gave to men, saying to the chorus of ocean nymphs, " I sent blind hope to inhabit in men's hearts," " I hid from men the foresight of their fate."

(8) The Lucumons were heads of noble families among the ancient Etruscans, who exercised priestly functions, and from whom the kings were taken. François Charles Marie Fourier (1772-1837) was a French socialist who advocated the reorganization of society into small communities without private property.

(9) In English folk-lore Queen Mab is the queen of the fairies. Shakespeare makes her a midwife to men's fancies.

(10) The sublime vision of judgment, which occupies sections 15-32, scarce needs annotation. Let it be read and reread till its solemn truths sink in. God shows the man how poor a thing is earth with all its treasures—esthetic, artistic, intellectual—if it be regarded as a finality, not a mere foretaste of the glories to come and a preparation therefor, no longer "visited by God's free spirit," and with the human soul forced to restrict itself forever to the little round of worldly delights. Even love, separated from the great love of God manifested in Christ—which the man has rejected on the poor plea that it was but a human invention—is but "the show of love," and can in no way satisfy. So at last the man, utterly overwhelmed with this revelation of his folly and loss, begs that at least he may still have that hope of glory which shall cheer him on his way and make it so much less "hard to really be a Christian."

(11) "Who can say" what? What the ultimate outcome may be, what victory of entire release from earth's allurements may yet be gained, what possibilities of infinite joy yet lie in the marvelous love divine. Though the Christian life is still found difficult, he welcomes the struggle, supported by hope, glad that heaven, through earth-renunciation, is still within his reach.

And "who can say" what strength has come to many a perplexed and weary spirit, not only from these two splendid poems which so fittingly bring our volume to an end, but from the whole body of devout and thoughtful verse with which this most deeply religious poet has dowered the world. May these selections add something to his renown, be welcomed as an inspiration by many to whom Browning has hitherto been a stranger, and redound to the greater glory of Christ and his Church!

